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THE RADICAL VOICE IN THE RHETORIC OF THE TEA PARTY MOVEMENT

by

Joel Lemuel

Under the Direction of Dr. Carol Winkler

ABSTRACT

This study examines the analyzes the 2010 National Tea Party Convention in order to determine whether the Tea Party Movements' rhetoric is unique from the rhetoric employed by previously studied movements. The study forwards the concept of a pseudo-movement: a movement that appears radical, but has normative, procedural goals.

INDEX WORDS: Social movements, Psuedo-movement, Conspiracy rhetoric, Prophectic tradition, Acceptance Speeches, Extremism

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Joel Lemuel

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Art Communication

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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Table of Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE TEA PARTY MOVEMENT	36
3	THE PROPHETIC VOICE IN THE RHETORIC OF THE TEA PARTY MOVMENT	44
	3.1 Key Figures in the Tea Party Movement	44
	3.2 Use of the Prophetic Voice	
	3.2.1 Prophecy and Crisis	47
	3.2.2 Announcing the Prophet	53
	3.2.3 The Divine Covenant and the People	59
	3.2.4 The Role of the Chosen People	64
	3.3 Summary and Conclusions	66
4	CONSPIRACY DISCOURSE IN THE RHETORIC OF THE TEA PARTY MOVEMENT	68
	4.1 Deviating from the Official Script	71
	4.2 The Evil Intent of the Conspirators	76
	4.3 The Endless Search for the Missing Link	78
	4.4 Summary and Conclusions	80
5.	SARAH PALIN AS THE HIGH-PRIEST OF THE MOVEMENT	82
	5.1 The Convention Metaphor	84
	5.2 Sarah Palin and the Priestly Voice	92
	5.2.1 Accepting the Nomination	95
	5.2.2 The Political Ritual	100

5.2.3 Calling for Solidarity 101

5.3 Summary and Conclusions 107

6 CONCLUSIONS 111

REFERENCES 119

Chapter 1: Introduction

> On April 15th, hundreds of thousands of citizens gathered in more than 800 cities to voice their opposition to out of control spending at all levels of government. Organized in all 50 states by Americans from all walks of life, these "tea parties" were a true grassroots protest of irresponsible fiscal policies and intrusive government.[1]

The excerpt above is from the homepage of Tax Day Tea Party, the official online headquarters of the 2009 Tea Party protests. As the website states, these protests were designed to voice grassroots opposition to the irresponsible and intrusive practices of the Obama administration on a wide array of issues ranging from the economic stimulus bill, to health-care reform, to climate change legislation. These protests were heavily promoted by conservative media organizations. Fox, in particular, ran many ads celebrating hundreds of rallies where citizens who were demanding real economic solutions. Conservative politicians have pointed to the Tea Parties as manifestations of public dissatisfaction with the Obama administration's economic policy.

On the left, these protests were being labeled as nothing more than "Astroturf," fake grass-roots activism organized from the top down by large corporations. Paul Krugman, a liberal economist, wrote an article describing the tea parties.

> Last but not least: it turns out that the tea parties don't represent a spontaneous outpouring of public sentiment. They're Astroturf (fake grass roots) events, manufactured by the usual suspects. In particular, a key

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[1] "Tax Day Tea Party," August 12, 2009, http://taxdayteaparty.com/.

> role is being played by FreedomWorks, an organization run by Richard Armey, the former House majority leader, and supported by the usual group of right-wing billionaires. And the parties are, of course, being promoted heavily by Fox News.[2]

Critics claimed that corporations with financial stake in the policy debates being held in Congress manufactured these events in order to create the illusion of public discontent. According to this view, corporate interests hired leaders to organize and participate in these rallies. The majority of the people that participate in these rallies did so on behalf of corporate interests. By challenging the organic character of the protests, critics were trying to rob the Tea Parties of their most commanding ability, that is, the skill to convince elected officials that "the public" was upset with the character of this change.

Conservative commentators and politicians responded to this challenge by defending the organic nature of the protests and by identifying the hypocrisy in liberal charges. Eric Odom, one of the Tea Parties' chief national organizers responded, "Those attacks are laughable… It's easy for that side of the political aisle who is well funded to look at a model that is not funded and accuse it of being funded because that is what they are used to." FreedomWorks Spokesman Adam Brandon claimed that the left was just as guilty of fake grass roots organizing when he stated, "You'd see 50 MoveOn.org people standing outside a gas station. We feel just as strong about our issues… If you look at MoveOn's model… if you consider that Astroturfing, I'd probably have to say that we're

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[2] Krugman, Paul, "Op-Ed Columnist - Tea Parties Forever - NYTimes.com," http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/13/opinion/13krugman.html.

Astroturfing."[3] The Tea Parties' defenders claimed that the Tea Parties are grassroots movements that were organized like any other political function. Spokespersons from FreedomWorks and other organizations accused of Astroturfing argued that providing funding and logistical support to a group of active and engaged citizens should not be considered illegitimate.

This on-going debate raises important questions for scholars interested in the rhetoric of social movements. If accusations from liberal politicians and journalists are true, what bearing, if any, do they have on the status of the Tea Party Movement? Does the rhetoric of the Tea Party Movement differ significantly from other movements that have been studied previously? If so is does that mean the Tea Party Movement is not a genuine social movement, or simply that it is a different class of movement? In order to answer these questions, we must first come to terms with what rhetorical scholars have already determined about movements generally. But even this is a difficult proposition because the study of social movements by rhetorical scholars remains essentially, in Stephen Lucas' terms, "epiphanic."[4] Though rhetorical scholars have been studying social movements for over fifty years, a consensus has yet to emerge over the definition of a social movement. This is partly because different scholars bring their own unique theoretical and methodological baggage to the discussion, and partly because the subject matter is so broad and diverse.

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[3] "The Tea Party Movement: Who's In Charge? - Politics - The Atlantic," http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2009/04/the-tea-party-movement-whos-in-charge/13041/.
[4] Stephen Lucas, "Coming to terms with movement studies," *Communication Studies* 31 (1980): 255.

Although there were movement studies in communication journals dating back to 1947, early articles treated social movements as mere chapters in the history of public address. The first significant theoretical contribution came from an essay written by Leland Griffin. Griffin's essay, "The Rhetoric of Historical Movements," represented a turning point in rhetorical study of social movements. Griffin argued historical movements were the results of men trying to affect change in their environments through persuasion. For Griffin, the object of the movement study was not to evaluate the effectiveness of individual rhetors but instead, to identify and isolate "rhetorical movement" from "historical movement". Just as history had a dynamic process of sustained social interaction with a beginning, middle and end, so to did the rhetorical process have a beginning, middle and end. The task of the rhetorical scholar was to identify this rhetorical progression by reading the discourse of the movement, and to analyze it using the skills and tools unique to rhetoricians.[5]

In Griffin's essay we find a central theme that runs across a large swath of movement studies: movements are organic processes organized by people dissatisfied with their surroundings. Griffin laid out his case for the organicity of movements when he said:

> Three phases of development may be noted: a period of inception, a time when the roots of a pre-existing sentiment, nourished by interested rhetoricians, begins to flower into public notice, or when some striking even occurs which immediately creates a host of aggressor rhetoricians and is itself sufficient to initiate the movement: 2. A period of rhetorical

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[5] Leland Griffin, "The rhetoric of historical movements," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 38 (1952): 184.

> crisis, a time when one of the opposing groups of rhetoricians (perhaps through the forsaking of trite or ineffective appeals, the initiation of new arguments, the employment of additional channels of propagation, or merely through the flooding of existing channels with a moving tide of discourse) succeeds in irrevocably disturbing that balance between the groups which had existed in the mind of the collective audience; and 3. A period of consummation, a time when the great proportion of aggressor rhetoricians abandon their efforts, either because they are convinced that opinion has been satisfactorily developed and the cause won, or because they are convinced that perseverance is useless, or simply because they meet the press of new interests.[6]

Griffin described a process where the historical movement literally grew out of a "pre-existing sentiment," nourished like a living organism by interested rhetoricians. If the primary tasks of sustaining and cultivating the life a movement were in the hand of rhetoricians, then movements were composed of ideas. The historical movement would continue to grow, persuading the collective audience of some groundbreaking revelation along the way. Finally, the movement would die when its caretakers (rhetoricians) abandoned it to invest in some other pursuit.

Edwin Black' treatise *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* is one of the most influential works to date in the field of rhetorical criticism. He sanctioned Griffin's historical approach when he described movement studies as one of three distinct approaches to the practice of rhetorical criticism. Black called Griffin's approach a type of historical relativism that would reveal recurrent

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[6] Ibid., 186.

patterns in the rhetoric of movements. This type of historical relativism might eventually develop empirically verifiable theories of the rhetoric of movements.[7] The influence of Griffin's historical approach and Black's sanction cannot be understated. According to Black, only four movement studies had appeared in national communication journals when he wrote his monograph. By the end of the 1970s, fifteen years later, some 300 articles and chapters in contributed volumes had been published.[8]

Years later, Griffin published another essay entitled, A Dramatistic Theory of the Rhetoric of Social Movements. Whereas his initial approach to the investigation of social movements was historical, this latter approach seemed strictly rhetorical, focusing on the dramatic elements of movement rhetoric. Griffin's theory, based on the writings of Kenneth Burke, argued that all movements were political, relating to the governance, domination, or authority, and politics was in essence, drama. There could be no drama without conflict, and this conflict had different characters, interacting in a scene.[9] Griffin's dramatistic model was useful in that it was the first attempt to fully elucidate, rather than assert, the rhetorical components of social movements. Griffin's model actually provided a methodology for analyzing movements uniquely suited for rhetoricians. This emphasis on dramatism would influence many other scholars that tried to theorize social movements.

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[7] Edwin Black, *Rhetorical criticism: A study in method* (Univ of Wisconsin Pr, 1978).
[8] Suzanne Riches and Malcolm Sillars, "The status of movement criticism," *Western Journal of Communication* 44 (1980): 275-287.
[9] Leland Griffin, "A dramatistic theory of the rhetoric of movements," *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke, 1924-1966* (1969).

Following in Griffin's footsteps, many scholars forwarded historical accounts of the rhetoric of different social movements. But in the 1970s, the landscape of movement studies started to shift. A new generation of communication scholars emerged that identified less with historians and more with the social scientists. The most prominent of these scholars was Herbert W. Simons. In 1970, Simons published, "Requirements, Problems, Strategies: A Theory of Persuasion for Social Movements." In this essay, Simons explored the exigencies and rhetorical choices of the leaders of different types of social movements. Simons relied on sociologists for his definition of a social movement. For Simons, a social movement constituted, "an uninstitutionalized collectivity that mobilizes for action to implement a program for the reconstitution of social norms or values."[10] Simons' contribution was significant because it was the first attempt to define the form of a movement. Griffin's essay had defined historical movements, but his definition was no more precise than men seeking change in their environment with varying degree of success.[11] Simons' essay was controversial because his definition of social movements seemed to focus the attention of rhetorical scholars on specific types of collectives simply because sociologists had classified them as such. Despite such criticism, Simons' approach did provide a model for other communication scholars to follow when investigating the rhetorical behavior of social movements.

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[10] Herbet Simons, "Requirements, problems, and strategies: A theory of persuasion for social movements," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56 (1970): 3.
[11] Griffin, "The rhetoric of historical movements."

Simons' sociological emphasis was continued by Dan Hahn and Ruth Gonchar in their essay, "Studying Social Movements: a Rhetorical Methodology." They applied a neo-Aristotelean approach to studying social movements, which they defined as "socially shared activities and beliefs directed toward the demand for change in some aspect of the social order."[12] While their definition was certainly less limiting than the one applied by Simons, it nonetheless borrowed from sociology and has been subject to some of the same criticism as Simons' model.

Building on Simons' work, Charles J. Stewart published an essay titled, "A Functional Approach to the Rhetoric of Social Movements," an essay which argued the only characteristics different social movements truly shared were their rhetorical exigencies. Stewart claimed that since social movements differed greatly in terms of size, organization, membership, purpose, and stages of development, predicting the rhetorical behavior of a movement based on its form would be difficult. Instead, he proposed a functional approach that viewed rhetoric as the agency through which movements performed necessary and vital functions. Stewart agreed that social movements were uninstitutionalized collectives seeking change, but he disagreed with the assertion that the functions of social movements were unique. According to Stewart, what distinguished social movements from other collectives was not so much the functions their rhetoric had to fulfill, but, rather the constraints placed upon fulfillment of these conditions. "[T]he uninstitutionalized nature of social movements greatly limits

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[12] Dan Hahn and Ruth Gonchar, "Studying social movements: A rhetorical methodology," *Communication Education* 20 (1971): 41.

their power to reward or punish and hence their strategic options."[13] Social movements might have had the same goals as more established and organized collectives, but because they were working with fewer resources, the strategy would be predictable. Stewart created a scheme that mapped out this strategy. It included transforming perceptions of history, transforming perceptions of society, prescribing courses of action, mobilizing for action, and sustaining the movement.[14]

The prominence of movement studies with strong sociological leanings provided the impetus for a group of scholars to forward a purely rhetorical theory of movements. This scholarship was best exemplified by the work of Robert S. Cathcart. Cathcart critiqued both historical and sociological approaches to the study of movement rhetoric. Historical approaches to the study of movements, he argued, had not produced definitions that explained when a movement was a movement; instead, these approaches constituted little more than loose understandings of different time periods. Using this method, Cathcart considered it hard to distinguish one set of collective actions from any other.[15] He argued social scientific definitions of movements had similar difficulties distinguishing social movements from other collectives. In Cathcart's view, the main problem with social scientific approaches to the study of social movements was that they focused on the contrast between individual action and collective action, and not

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[13] Charles Stewart, "A functional approach to the rhetoric of social movements," *Communication Studies* 31 (1980): 301.
[14] Ibid., 303.
[15] Robert Cathcart, "New Approaches to the Study of Movements: Defining Movements Rhetorically," *Western Speech* Spring (1972): 85.

on the distinction between collective action and the established social structure. He also contended that social scientists had trouble distinguishing the normal movements of a dynamic status quo and an actual social movement[16].

In his essay titled, "New Approaches to the Study of Movements: Defining Movements Rhetorically," Cathcart developed a dramatistic theory of movements based on Burkeian principals. He argued the mark of a movement was not *merely* the existence of an uninstitutionalized collective. For a movement to be present, a conflict between the collective and the political establishment must exist. This conflict, or "dialectical enjoinment," happened when the collective was set apart from the establishment through some sort of language game (Cathcart 1972). An actor or group of actors that believed true justice could not be achieved without an immediate corrective to the established moral and social order needed to emerge. One must also be able to observe a response from the establishment that treated these actor(s)' demands as challenges to the foundation of the established order.[17] What was important for Cathcart was the interplay between the collective and the establishment. This interplay caused both sets of actors to engage in behaviors that caused the collective to be perceived as a movement by the general public. In a later essay, Cathcart elaborated on the difference between managerial rhetoric, utilized in situations where there is an agreement on the basic values of a society and a belief in the perfectability of the system, and confrontational rhetoric, which is utilized in

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[16] Ibid., 87.
[17] Cathcart, "New Approaches to the Study of Movements: Defining Movements Rhetorically."

situations where there can be no agreement on either the basic value of the system or its institutions.[18] Only confrontational rhetoric, Cathcart argued, gave rise to dialectical enjoinment and the perception of a movement.

Though Cathcart seemed to accept the definition of a social movement as an uninstitutionalized collective seeking change, his theory is important because he also proposed a rhetorical definition of movements. He argued, "A movement is perceived, created, and responded to *symbolically* as its confrontational strategies are juxtaposed with the symbolic forms and contents of the established and legitimized collectives with which it interacts.[19] Because movements moved through language, the tools used to analyze movements should focus on language. Cathcart was just one of many scholars trying to generate a rhetorical theory of movements.

Charles Wilkinson tried to expand on Cathcart's approach by refining his definition of a rhetorical movement. Wilkinson argued that Cathcart was too quick to dismiss the work of sociologists and historians. While he agreed that a definition of a rhetorical movement needed to specify the specific task of the rhetorical critic, he also felt that sociological and historical definitions of social movements had important components that needed to be accounted for in any rhetorical definition of a movement. Thus, he defined rhetorical movements as, "Languaging strategies by which a significantly vocal part of an established society, experiencing together a sustained dialectical tension growing out of

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[18] Robert Cathcart, "Movements: Confrontation as rhetorical form," *Southern Communication Journal* 43 (1978): 233-247.
[19] Robert Cathcart, "Defining social movements by their rhetorical form," *Communication Studies* 31 (1980): 269.

moral (ethical) conflict, agitate to induce cooperation in others, either directly or indirectly, thereby affecting the status quo."[20] According to this definition, every movement falls within the scope of the rhetorical critic because they are the result of languaging strategies that are essentially rhetorical. Whatever the sociological or historical components of a movement by accident of time, place and circumstance, movements are inherently rhetorical. Wilkinson's major departure from Cathcart was that he believed the components of socio-psychological definitions were helpful in explicating both the structure and the process of dramatism that rhetoricians require to analyze movements. For example, by examining the relationship of the movement to the established social hierarchy, the sociologist can shed light on the scene in which movements take place. For Wilkinson, movements always took place in history, within societies, and involve a certain number of agents, and a proper account of movements requires using the tools provided by other disciplines when appropriate[21].

Some scholars criticized the "rhetorical movement" approach forwarded by Cathcart and Wilkinson. For some the whole endeavor seemed to be pointless. In an essay entitled, "Social Movement Theory: A Dead End," Hahn and Gonchar argued that generating a rhetorical theory of social movements was a fruitless pursuit because the rhetoric of social movements was not significantly different from the rhetoric of persuasive campaigns generally.[22] Stated differently, many

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[20] Charles Wilkinson, "A rhetorical definition of movements," *Communication Studies* 27 (1976): 91.
[21] Ibid., 93.
[22] Dan Hahn and Ruth Gonchar, "Social movement theory: A dead end," *Communication Monographs* 44 (1977): 372.

sociological distinctions may exist between a social movement (defined as an uninstitutionalized collective seeking change) and a lobby, for instance, but those differences are not rhetorical. And if the movements were not rhetorically distinct from other collectives then there was little need for a rhetorical theory of movements per se. Hahn and Gonchar focused on debunking the rhetorical distinctions between movements and other collectives proposed in sociological approaches, most specifically those forwarded in Simons' model[23]. Yet, even though the title of the essay seemed grim, the authors' conclusion provided some hope for the scholar interested in movement studies. While they explicitly argued against the possibility of a genre which encompassed the entirety of movement rhetoric, they did concede the usefulness of identifying different genres of movements. For example, some movements might use confrontational rhetoric while others might use agitational rhetoric. Perhaps it would be critically useful to identify those genres and explore them.[24]

David Zarefsky similarly argued the specious nature of rhetorical distinctions between social movements and persuasive campaigns generally. Zarefsky seemed particularly concerned with the implicit (and sometimes explicit) claim that social movements or organic collectives organized from the bottom-up. He wrote an essay that challenged organic criterion by charting the rhetorical journey of the Johnson Administration's *War on Poverty*. He argued that the War on Poverty was rhetorically indistinct from a traditional social movement. The War on Poverty was an attempt to significantly alter the social hierarchy by changing

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[23] Ibid., 62.
[24] Ibid., 64.

both the value system and the institutions of the established order. This program created a dialectical enjoinment that gave rise to two counter-movements that challenged the War on Poverty from multiple fronts.[25] Zarefsky argued that whether using Simons' criteria or Cathcart's, the fact that the War on Poverty originated in the halls of government was rhetorically insignificant.

From this study, Zarefsky drew two conclusions. First, social movements were merely a subset of the broader category of rhetorical movements. Social movements were traditionally seen as emerging from radical division because previous scholars had focused almost exclusively on class divisions. But using that fact as a criterion in defining rhetorical movements seemed needlessly limiting. Like Hahn and Gonchar, Zaresfy realized that the rhetoric of a social movement was indistinguishable from that of a persuasive campaign. Second, a rhetorical definition of movement was still needed. It was here that Zarefsky broke with Hahn and Gonchar. While the latter felt that the form and goals of movements were too diverse to justify a single theory, Zarefsky believed that the task of the rhetorical critic was to "identify rhetorical situations to be called movements."[26] Yet he criticized the rhetorical movement approaches because they were incapable of distinguishing between movements and persuasive campaigns. He argued that the problem with current theories of movements failed because their primary goal was to distinguish movements from non-

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[25] David Zarefsky, "President Johnson's War on Poverty: The Rhetoric of Three "Establishment" Movements," *Communication Monographs* (1977).
[26] Zarefsky, "President Johnson's War on Poverty: The Rhetoric of Three "Establishment" Movements," 370; David Zarefsky, "A Skeptical View of Movement Studies," *Central States Speech Journal* 31 (1980).

movements. Instead, critics should try to determine rhetorically significant categories or types under the broader rubric of movements. Thus, Zarefsky seemed to agree with Hahn and Gonchar on the task of the critic, though not on the ultimate goal of criticism.

A final criticism of the rhetorical movement approach worth mentioning came from Michael McGee. His In Search of the People': A Rhetorical Alternative, argued that "movement" ought to be thought of as the "historical movement of ideas."[27] Seven years later he published an essay taking a much more radical approach. In, "Social Movement: Phenomenon or Meaning?," McGee argued that the problem with most movement studies was that scholars treated movements as phenomena. For McGee, a social movement was merely "a *meaning,* a conclusion one comes to about the phenomenon being witnessed."[28] What human beings perceived as movement was just an attempt to make sense out of their environment: to rationalize the irrational. In other words, a movement was perceived, created and responded to symbolically as its strategies were juxtaposed with the symbolic forms and contents of the established and collectives with which it interacted. Movements were simply interpretations for patterns of language characterizations, and not observable phenomena that existed in the real world. It was not that movements did not exist; they did exist, but only through language. "No error is involved in seeing a parade of picketers as a 'social movement.' The mistake is treating the meaning as if it were itself a

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[27] Michael McGee, "in search of ëthe peopleí: a rhetorical alternative," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61 (1975): 245.
[28] Michael McGee, "Social Movement: Phenomenon or Meaning?," *Central States Speech Journal* 31 (1980): 236.

phenomenon: The objective, empirical phenomenon of human beings angrily parading in front of a fence stays the same despite my choice of one term or another to characterize and conceptualize it".[29] In objective phenomena, people and objects moved. In language games, it was ideas that moved for McGee.

But McGee's criticism did not preclude movement studies altogether. Like Zarefsky, McGee was interested in generating a rhetorical theory of movement, but his approach was entirely different. Identifying categories of movements would be a feckless endeavor, he insisted, because it still treated movements as though they were things and not meanings. For McGee, the only way to interrogate a movement was to examine its substance, namely, language. So according to McGee, the only way to actually measure the existence of movement was to chart the change in meaning of words used in a society:

> When people use new words—or obviously attribute new meaning to old words — we can assume that consciousness of their environment has "moved" by measure of the difference in descriptors themselves or in meanings. We will not say that "movement" exists or has occurred until we can demonstrate by a survey of public discourse that descriptors of the environment have changed *in common usage* in such a way as to make 'movement' an arguably acceptable term useful in formulating the chain of facts we believe to have constituted a real change. The primary objective of a theorist working under such constraint is to *prove* rather than *presume* the existence of 'movement(s).[30]

The smallest unit of analysis in McGee's theory of movement would be a word. Words were descriptors that signaled the presence of an idea. By mapping the

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Zarefsky, "A Skeptical View of Movement Studies," 243.

change in a term's usage, or the movement between a term and an idea, one could actually prove the existence of movement.

It is true that social movements are carried forward through language, but it is shortsighted to simply declare that movements are merely meanings. Humans are symbol using animals and our entire world is mediated by language. All humans use discursive practices to characterize material circumstances, but this does not imply that these things are not real. Responding to McGee's criticism in a later article, Cathcart wrote, "Movements do exist in space and over time. They have membership, leadership, and organization. They do manage resources, and, above all, they engage in acts that create and identify the 'reality' of the movement. In our perception of a social movement, these material aspects of movements become important as they acquire symbolic meaning".[31] To some extent, social movements are observable phenomena with concrete aspects that exist in space and over time; those concrete aspects are given meaning through language.

So what, can current scholarship tell us about the distinct rhetorical dimensions of social movements? After surveying communication literature, a few points seem clear. First, social movements are the results of languaging strategies employed by real people, in particular contexts, in particular times. While it is true that movements move primarily through language, they embody important components that are materially based and these components are worthy of examination. Second, social movements are arguably a subset of

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[31] Cathcart, "Defining social movements by their rhetorical form," 268.

rhetorical movements. Because the rhetoric of social movements and persuasive campaigns are interchangeable, it is difficult for rhetorical scholars to create a distinct genre that binds movement rhetoric per se. Third, because movements are essentially rhetorical, rhetoricians have important contributions to make to the study of movements. Sociological and historical approaches are important and certainly helpful to rhetorical critics, but the discipline does need to establish its focus and distinguish it from other disciplines. Fourth, the primary task of the critic developing a rhetorical theory of movements is not to distinguish movements from non-movements but to identify important categories within the broader category in order to make empirically testable predictions about how different movements will behave. Scholars have previously identified two clear categories of movements.

Ralph Smith and Russell Windes wrote an article in which they proposed a theory of innovational movements. Smith and Windes criticized the definitions of rhetorical movements forwarded by Cathcart and Wilkinson as they were too limiting in that they only focused on confrontation as a rhetorical strategy. They argued that movements that used other rhetorical strategies were also worthy of study. They juxtaposed conflict-establishment movements, born out of a dialectical tension and using confrontational rhetoric, with innovational movements, groups that sought to improve on the institutions of a society to make them more in line with the established value system.[32] The authors identified the Sunday School Movement, a subset of the evangelical movement,

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[32] Ralph Smith and Russel Windes, “The innovational movement: A rhetorical theory,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61 (1975): 140-153.

as an innovational movement. They placed innovational movements and establishment-conflict movements at opposite ends of a continuum of movements with the hope that further scholarship will fill in the continuum further. They described innovational movement theory as, "a step forward for construction a general theory of movement analysis."[33]

While he did not build directly off of the continuum suggest by Smith and Windes, Theodore Windt created a similar typology of protest rhetoric. Windt divided protest movements into two broad categories: procedural movements, and ideological movements. Procedural movements use what Windt described as deliberative rhetoric. Deliberative rhetoric was primarily concerned with the form of politics in a democratic society. This form set the parameters of what was permissible and practical. All policy changes must be conducted through existing structures, whether by convincing those in power to capitulate or replacing them with leaders who will be more responsive.[34] Windt used the Black Civil Rights Movement, the Feminist Movement, and the Anti-War Movement of the 1960's as examples of procedural movements. While there were significant differences, namely, that deliberative rhetoric was often confrontational, procedural movements seemed to resemble innovational movements in that they were not a fundamental challenge to the value system of a society.

Ideological movements, by contrast, believed in the primacy of content – their particular doctrines. They tended to see inequality and injustice as products of a

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[33] Ibid., 152.
[34] Theodore Windt, *Presidents and protesters: Political rhetoric in the 1960s* (University Alabama Press, 1990), 141.

corrupt system or a corrupt ruling class that could be changed only by destroying or radically changing the system. In this view the system was beyond redemption, and only by overthrowing the system can grievances be addressed.[35] Ideological movements seemed to coincide neatly with Cathcart's conflict-establishment paradigm.

Windt argued that protest movements started out using deliberative rhetoric, and made ideological turns once movement leaders began to lose hope that their demands would ever be met.[36] After attempting to compromise with elected officials, frustration eventually set in movement leaders started to lose trust in the system. In a few cases, single-issue procedural movements transformed into ideological movements that sought to transform the entire system.[37]

Conversely, he posited, ideological movements could start to lose their momentum if the establishment made important concessions, robbing movement leaders of their most important rhetorical resource. Radical ideological rhetoric was most powerful when protestors believed the establishment had not acted upon a crisis as promptly or decisively as it should have. When the establishment did address the concerns of protestors, radical ideological rhetoric had little lasting influence. This was especially the case in the United States, where the political system is designed to incorporate ideological challenges without changing the basic political structure.[38]

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[35] Ibid., 142.
[36] Ibid., 197.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 208.

Thus far, the vast majority of the literature investigating movements, at least in the American context, has examined movements to the left of the political spectrum. With a few notable exceptions, there is very little scholarship focusing on conservative movements in the United States. Sonja Foss examined the rhetoric of the debate over the Equal Rights Amendment using a fantasy theme analysis. Foss, building on Bormann's method for analyzing the rhetoric of social movements, argued that the discourse formulated by both sides of the debate, both liberal and conservative, created worldviews or rhetorical visions that provoked some of the intense emotion that characterized the debate.[39] Martha Solomon authored a similar essay that explored the mythic visions of ERA opponents from a mythic perspective.[40] Randall Lake engaged in a "logological" analysis of the rhetoric of anti-abortion activists, arguing the rhetoric appealed to Christian theology and deontological ethics.[41] Marsha Vanderford analyzed the use of vilification strategies in anti-abortion rhetoric that painted pro-choice advocates as corrupt conspirators.[42] While this is not a comprehensive account of every essay written about conservative movements in the United States, comparing the number of essays published that analyze conservative

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[39] Sonja Foss, "Equal Rights Amendment controversy: Two worlds in conflict," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65 (1979): 275.
[40] Maratha Solomon, "The 'positive Woman's' Journey: A Mythic Analysis of the Rhetoric of the Stop Era.," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65, no. 3 (October 1979): 262.
[41] Randall A. Lake, "Order and Disorder in Anti-Abortion Rhetoric: A Logological View.," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70, no. 4 (November 1984): 425.
[42] Marsha Vanderford, "Vilification and social movements: A case study of pro-life and pro-choice rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75 (1989): 166-182.

movements with the number of articles focusing on liberal or progressive movements reveals a major discrepancy.

The dearth of scholarship on this class of movements persists for a number of reasons, but the most important has to do with the penchant of rhetorical scholars to focus on social change instead of social maintenance.[43] In the American political tradition, socially conservative movements tend to sprout up in reaction to progressive political change on events that threaten the status of their members.[44] Many rhetorical scholars have tended to view these conservative counter-movements as mere impediments to the process of progressive social change, and thus unworthy of the same attention that liberal movements receive. But even scholars strictly interested in the process of rhetorical movement from the established order must take the rhetoric of counter-movements into account. Though he did not foreground counter-movements in his introductory essay on movement studies, Griffin later admitted this was a significant oversight. In "On Studying Movements" Griffin stated, "…the counter-movement now seemed central to the dialectical development of a movement's rhetoric."[45] Griffin argued that the study of counter-movements was important because it shed light on the rhetorical strategies used by a social movement in order to overcome opposition. In this way the study of a counter-movement was a necessary ingredient in the study of social movements generally. Lucas advocated the study of counter-

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[43] Lucas, "Coming to terms with movement studies," 265.
[44] Seymour Lipset and Earl Raab, *The politics of unreason: right wing extremism in America, 1790-1970* (Heinemann, 1971, 1978), 14.
[45] Leland Griffin, "On studying movements," *Communication Studies* 31, no. 4 (1980): 226.

movements for its own sake. In the counter-movement, he argued, the critic could glean much about the symbolic processes of social control, a topic neglected by many disciplines.

Fortunately, the study of counter-movements and conservative social movements has not been overlooked in all disciplines. For decades sociologists have been studying various conservative movements that fit the labels counter-movement or conservative movement. This body of literature can be roughly divided into two groups: studies of counter-movements and studies of right-wing movements.

The term counter-movement is typically defined by sociologists as a movement mobilized against another social movement.[46] These definitions rely on earlier definitions of social movements that classify them as uninstitutionalized organic collectives seeking social change. Thus, protest or resistance located within an established institution like the state cannot be classified as a counter-movement even if it arises in resistance to social movement. Rhetorical scholars struggle with using these definitions for obvious reasons. It is established that the rhetoric of movements is essentially indistinguishable from persuasive campaigns generally.[47] For sociologists, social movements may have a distinct form that makes them distinct from other collectives, but for many rhetorical scholars, the similarities in the rhetorical strategies employed by both groups

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[46] Lewis Killian and Ralph Turner, *Collective behavior* (Prentice-Hall, 1957); Mayer Zald and Burt Useem, “Movement and Countermovement: Loosely Coupled Conflict” (1982).
[47] Hahn and Gonchar, “Social movement theory: A dead end”; Zarefsky, “President Johnson's War on Poverty: The Rhetoric of Three "Establishment" Movements”; Zarefsky, “A Skeptical View of Movement Studies.”

seem to suggest that any distinction between the two is not of a rhetorical nature. A definition that rests up opposition to a genuine social movement seems useless for the rhetorical scholar. It begs a question that cannot be answered definitively. One would simply be defining away interesting rhetorical behavior for definition's sake.

Other social scientific definitions of counter-movements have avoided this pitfall. Mottl defined a counter-movement as opposing not another movement, but rather social change from groups lower in the stratification hierarchy.[48] Similarly, Tilly defined a "reactive movement" as a group's defensive mobilization against another group.[49] These approaches classified mass mobilization against another movement as counter-movements if, and only if, those movements were trying to further economic equality. These approaches were helpful in that they would allow us to examine struggles between movements in various forms (bottom-up and organic versus top-down and institutionalized). At the same time, these definitions were also limiting in that they viewed class as the only important axis of struggle for counter-movements. And yet, this emphasis on class has helped to focus the attention of many sociologists on conservative or right-wing movements in the United States.

Clarence Lo defined right-wing movements as, "social movements whose stated goals are to maintain structures of order, status, honor, or traditional social differences and values." These movements tended to cause, and sometimes

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[48] Tahi Mottl, "The analysis of countermovements," *Social Problems* 27 (1980): 620-635.
[49] Charles Tilly, "Major forms of collective action in western Europe 1500ñ1975," *Theory and Society* 3 (1976): 365-375.

directly advocatde, the perpetuation or increase of economic or political inequalities.[50] Social scientists have examined several right-wing movements in great detail including the anti-busing, Stop-ERA, pro-life, and conservative religious movements. Others have examined a subset of right-wing movements called right-wing extremist movements. Right-wing extremist movements differ from other conservative movements in their use of historical simplism, moralism, and conspiracy theories.[51] This scholarship has produced various theoretical contributions. For instance, Seymour Lipset's theory of status preservatism contends that declining groups seek to maintain their eroding status by strengthening or creating identification with prestigious groups in the past. Right-wing groups dwell in the past because they have lost their group attachments and identities.[52] He also argues that right-wing movements are forms of anti-modernist culture that oppose the self-gratification, equality, securlarism, and the loosening of traditional restraints.[53] A major criticism of Lipset's work, one that I happen to share, is that his theory of status preservatism over-determines economic relations and discounts the importance of ideology. For Lipset, ideologies were epiphenomenal because they were constantly present and only became important when status erosion occured. Thus, many ideologies (or any

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[50] Clarence Lo, "Countermovements and conservative movements in the contemporary US," *Annual Review of Sociology* 8 (1982): 108.
[51] Lipset and Raab, *The politics of unreason: right wing extremism in America, 1790-1970*, 7.
[52] SM Lipset, "The revolt against modernity'," *Mobilization, center-periphery structures and nation-building: a volume in commemoration of Stein Rokkan* (1981): 451.
[53] Lipset and Raab, *The politics of unreason: right wing extremism in America, 1790-1970*.

ideology) would suffice to express the underlying urge for status preservationism.[54] By contrast, other scholars have argued that status-oriented movements should be seen as attempts to build and sustain moral orders, rather than angry responses to declining social status. According to this view, the symbols employed by the movement were important because they gave insight into ideologies of right-wing movements.[55]

In his book, *Theory of Collective Behavior*, Neil Smelser made an important distinction between norm-oriented movements and value oriented movements. Though this insight was not specifically about the study of conservative movements, it will provide a useful point of departure for this project. According to Smelser, a norm-oriented movement was interested in changing the regulations that control existing norms, or protecting those norms from threatening change.[56] The concept of a norm-oriented movement was very similar to Windt's idea of procedural movements. Both were interested in procedural changes within the existing political system. Value-oriented movements saw the normative changes they demanded as part of a "fundamental reallocation of value." Adherents to these movements were primarily interested in taking political power, rather than changing public policy. In their view, the current society was in decay and the only way to achieve future harmony and stability was to tear down the current system.[57] Value-oriented

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[54] Ibid., 340, 392. 427.
[55] Ann Page and Donald Clelland, "The Kanawha County textbook controversy: A study of the politics of life style concern," *Social Forces* 57 (1978): 265-281.
[56] Neil Smelser, *Theory of collective behavior* (Free Pr, 1971), 110.
[57] Ibid., 121.

movements seemed to coincide conceptually with Windt's ideological movements. Both were convinced the current system cannot be reformed and both engaged in conspiratorial, and sometimes extremist, rhetoric.

Lipset and Raab used Smelser's typology in their analysis of the decline of right-wing extremist movements. They argued that right-wing extremist movements in American have typically been value-oriented movements that ended up, at best, in creating normative change. And, like Windt they believed the success of value oriented, right-wing extremist movements in creating procedural change has been a major reason for their demise:

> Because of the coalition and cafeteria nature of the two-party system in America, it has had the flexibility to respond to extremist movements and tendencies when they appeared substantial. These movements and tendencies have had the ability to influence those parties that have the power to modify the normative structure. Restrictive immigration laws, for example, and repressive measures in general have been embraced and enacted by main-stream parties, under-cutting support for right-wing extremist movements…They all this process "cooption: and ascribe it, in their fashion, to the evil designs of the main-stream political leaders, who wish to maintain the basic value system.[58]

Whether viewed as cooption by evil elites or responsiveness by an establishment struggling to adapt to the demands of its constituency, Lipset, Raab, Smelser and Windt all seem to agree that value-oriented extremist movements began with genuine aims of reconstituting the social order, but often fell short because of the response of the state. This statement is significant, especially in the context of

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[58] Lipset and Raab, *The politics of unreason: right wing extremism in America, 1790-1970*, 499.

American politics.

There are two major political parties in the United States. America operates on a plurality system where constituencies elect single representatives. This is different from the proportional representation systems common in Western Europe. Because American constituencies elect single representatives, the success of third and fourth parties is marginal. The enduring nature of the two party system means that concessions to social movements from the state tend to affect the perception of and feelings toward party in power (or in relative power) more than the weaker party or vice versa. [59] In this context, the theory of Lipset et al. regarding the relationship between the decline of value-oriented movements and capitulation by the state has some important implications.

A hypothetical example might illustrate my point. Imagine a conservative movement with a series of demands aimed at the state. In order to quell the threat posed by the movement, the party in power decides to adopt some of their demands as a platform in the coming election. This move significantly diminishes the appeal of the movement. Now members of the movement have to determine how they are going to interpret this sequence of events. Was the movement successful in convincing the party to adopt some of their demands? If members feel this way, are they not more likely to vote for said party in the coming election than they would have been otherwise? In contrast, let us say that other members of the movement feel the party made a deliberate attempt to co-opt the movement. But are they not still more likely to vote for that party after it adopted

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[59] Ibid., 500.

their platform, than if the party had not responded to the movement at all? And what about voters observing these events from outside the movement? I would argue in their view the party might have become more responsive to the will of a certain segment of the population. If outside observers oppose that policy measures taken up by the party from the movement, then they may be even less likely to vote for them in the upcoming election. But if they agreed with those measures, or were even ambivalent, might the perception of responsiveness by the party affect their voting preferences?

The theory proposed by Lipset et al. envisions a system where value-oriented extremist movements are trying to achieve a fundamental reallocation of values and a major reason for their success or failure is the response of the state, perceived by the movement as responsiveness, cooption, or disregard. According to this view, the state will receive much of the credit or blame for the progression or decline of value-oriented extremist movements. Obviously, the state is not the only actor responsible for the fate of these movements. Many scholars have documented the extraordinarily difficult task of movement leaders. Movement leaders must negotiate a careful path that alters perceptions of history and the present, prescribes courses of action, mobilizes for action, and sustains the movements against apathy and setbacks.[60] Most movements, and especially value-oriented extremist movements, are not successful over the long-term in one or more of these tasks. But in the cases of movements that do successfully

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[60] Stewart, “A functional approach to the rhetoric of social movements”; Simons, “Requirements, problems, and strategies: A theory of persuasion for social movements”; Seymour Lipset and Earl Raab, *The politics of unreason* (Heinemann London, 1971), 481.

navigate this rhetorical obstacle course, the response of the state becomes a focus concerning the movements' progression.

The history of conservative social movements seems to support this analysis. However, examination of a contemporary conservative counter-movement has caused me to believe that a caveat should be added. In the view of Lipset et al. the goal of the value-oriented extremist movements is to fundamentally change a society's value system; their dealings with the state are all intended to further that ultimate goal. But what about movements that appear to be value-oriented, but whose goal is not a fundamental reallocation of value but the promotion of a political party? In this case, the responsiveness from the state should not be seen as a catalyst in the decline of the movement; on the contrary, it seems that procuring a favorable response from the state would be its ultimate achievement. Lipset and Raab stated that, "While no party can afford to cater to an 'extremist' group, it must also be responsive to any swell of expression or aspiration which deviant political movements feed or feed on. In being so responsive, the two major parties vitiate the popular appeal of the deviant movements."[61] I am envisioning a case where an extremist group creates (or taps into) this swell of expression or aspiration for the sole purpose of getting one of the major parties to placate the movement, rebranding the party in the process. I call movements of this type – seemingly value-oriented movements whose goal is to rebrand a political party – pseudo-movements.

I believe the Tea Party Movement may be an example of a pseudo-

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[61] Lipset and Raab, *The politics of unreason*, 503.

movement. I would like to test this theory by examining the rhetorical choices of the movement and comparing them with what we already understand about radical conservative movements. This project is significant for two reasons. First, it will contribute to our understanding of a movement that may become a burgeoning political force in the coming years. Whether the Tea Party Movement is absorbed into the Republican Party or it becomes an alternative party, many observers believe that it could have some degree of lasting political influence.[62] Others are quick to dismiss these claims, arguing that the Tea Party Movement is the equivalent of a political fad that will die out after an election cycle or two.[63] Either way, investigating the ways the rhetoric of the Tea Party Movement is similar to or differs from the rhetoric of other social movements will give rhetoricians a way of contributing to public debate in which we have said very little.

Second, by investigating the rhetoric of the Tea Party Movement, I might be able to develop a rhetorical theory of pseudo-movements. For decades, movement studies have been losing prominence as a high priority for rhetorical critics. Movement studies stalled due, in large part, to the lack of a "rich theoretical underpinning that might direct the critic of movements to more penetrating understandings" of movement rhetoric. Whalen and Hauser argued

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[62] Manu Raju, "Tea party power swaying centrists?," *Politico.com*, July 1, 2010, http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0610/39259.html; Kate Zernike, "In Power Push, Movement Sees Base in G.O.P.," *The New York Times*, January 14, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/15/us/politics/15party.html?_r=1&ref=us.
[63] Glenn Greenwald, "Palin and the Tea-Party "movement": Nothing New," *Salon.com*, February 7, 2010, http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/2010/02/07/palin.

an inordinate focus on the rhetorical strategies and tactics of movements contributed to the stall by leaving an ambiguous picture of the distinctive rhetorical dimensions of social movements.[64] I disagree. Movement studies have lost momentum precisely because they were not "catalogues of tactics." In other words, the studies that focused on the strategies of movements were not systematic enough. Critics have not taken up the call of several scholars to systematically identify unique classes of movements, choosing instead to focus on developing meta-level theories of movement rhetoric. It is certainly true that a theory outlining the rhetorical strategies of a class of movements will not produce a picture of the distinct rhetorical dimensions of movements. But these dimensions will remain elusive because of the rhetorical similarities between movements and persuasive campaigns.

The purpose of this essay is to take a first step towards pulling movement studies out of this critical stall. I will determine whether the rhetoric of pseudo-movements is rhetorically distinct from rhetoric of movements that currently exist on the continuum of rhetorical movements.[65] If so, I will be able to add pseudo-movement rhetoric as another gradient on the continuum of movement rhetoric. From there, I might be able to sketch out a genuinely rhetorical theory of pseudo-movement that might give insight into the rhetoric of many contemporary and

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[64] Gerard Hauser and Susan Whalen, "New rhetoric and new social movements," *Emerging theories of human communication* (1997): 119.
[65] Zarefsky, "President Johnson's War on Poverty: The Rhetoric of Three "Establishment" Movements"; Zarefsky, "A Skeptical View of Movement Studies"; Hahn and Gonchar, "Social movement theory: A dead end"; Smith and Windes, "The innovational movement: A rhetorical theory"; Windt, *Presidents and protesters: Political rhetoric in the 1960s*.

historical movements while also helping to push movement studies forward. This theory will add to both the communication and sociology disciplines by combining some of the theoretical insights of each to deliver a more thorough picture of counter-movement rhetoric than either has delivered on its own.

I am partially narrowing the scope of my investigation to the rhetoric employed at national convention because the Tea Party Movement is a loose collection of ideas and symbols. There is no national platform or official movement leader. The National Tea Party Convention was designed specifically to address this problem. This convention featured prominent voices in the movement, and showcased some politicians in order to project them as future leaders of the movement. The convention took place at a formative stage in the movement's development: the inception stage. In "The Rhetoric of Historical Movements" Griffin identified three phases of development for all movements, the first of which being the inception period.[66] During inception a preexisting sentiment is nourished by interested rhetoricians and begins to flower into public notice. The convention would seem to be the culmination of the inception stage for the Tea Party Movement. Examining the inception period of the movement is most appropriate because the movement is still in its infancy and has not completed the second phase of development.

I will employ a variety of methods in my analysis of the convention. I will conduct a close textual analysis of the important speeches delivered at the national convention. I will examine the speeches and compare them against the

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[66] Griffin, "The rhetoric of historical movements."

previously established strategies of ideological protest movements, value-oriented movements, and right-wing extremist movements in order to determine if a unique type of rhetoric is being employed. All three of these conceptual models share affinities with two broad areas of rhetorical studies: the prophetic discourse tradition and conspiracy discourse. Chapter three will examine the important speakers of the National Tea Party Convention, as well as public statements by potential leaders of the Tea Party Movement in order to determine if the discourse is consistent with what we know about the prophetic tradition. Chapter four will focus exclusively on speeches delivered at the national convention. It will examine the speeches delivered in order to find similarities or differences between the use of conspiracy discourse at the convention with the expectations of the literature. Chapter five will focus exclusively on the final speaker of the convention. It will compare her speech to the other convention addresses in order to find and explain any similarities or differences. Chapter six will draw some conclusions about the Tea Party Movement and whether it resembles a radical conservative movement, a pseudo-movement, or something different.

In the chapter two, I will conduct a situational analysis of the Tea Party Movement. I will answer some of the questions posed by previous researchers regarding social movements. These questions include the following. Is the Tea Party Movement an organic collective? Who comprises the movement's membership? What circumstances provided the impetus for the movement's mobilization? In order to answer these questions, I will enter this project into conversation with scholars from the field of political theory. In addition to being

studied by rhetoricians, social movements have been investigated by sociologists, political scientists, and political theorists. My hope is to use a sampling of these theoretical approaches to enrich our understanding of the movement and its political context.

Chapter 2: A Situational Analysis of the Tea Party Movement

Before we address any theoretical questions concerning the rhetoric of the movement, we must first get a sense of the contours of the movement. What is the Tea Party Movement? Where are the edges of the movement and who if anyone leads it?

The Tea Party Movement refers to a wave of local political protests that occurred began in 2009. These Tea Parties should be divided into three waves: the February Spending Protests, the Tax Day Tea Parties, and the Taxpayer March on Washington. Though the initial protests in February did not bear the tea party label, I would argue that they were the precursors to the movement because they were organized by FreedomWorks, one of the main corporate sponsor of Tea Party events.

On February 10, 2009, FreedomWorks employee Mary Rakovich led a protest outside President Barack Obama's town hall meeting in Fort Myers, Florida, displaying a sign with an image of a pig and the statement "$650,000,000 for DTV coupons."[67] Interviewed by a local reporter, Rakovich explained that she "thinks the government is wasting way too much money helping people receive high definition TV signals" and that "Obama promotes

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[67] Brendan Steinhauser, “Cape Coral Tea Party is ON!,” *FreedomWorks.org*, March 29, 2009, http://www.freedomworks.org/blog/bstein80/cape-coral-tea-party-is-on; Brendan Steinhauser, “FreedomWorks plans to protest Obama in Fort Myers, Florida Tuesday!,” *FreedomWorks.org*, February 9, 2009, http://www.freedomworks.org/blog/bstein80/freedomworks-plans-to-protest-obama-in-fort-myers-.

socialism, although 'he doesn't call it that".[68] After the protest, she was invited to appear in front of a national audience on Neil Cavuto's Fox News Channel program, Tour World, where she complained about the excessive spending policies of the Obama administration.

A week later, a blogger known as Liberty Belle was asked by FreedomWorks to organize a "porkulus" protest in Seattle, Washington. Conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh coined the term "porkulus" when he described the stimulus bill signed into law by President Obama on February 17, 2009 as an improper mix of stimulus money and pork barrel spending. A similar protest was held the next day in Denver, Colorado, and another was held the day after that in Mesa, Arizona. The protest organizers in Denver and Mesa boasted they were able to gather at least 500 protesters.[69]

It was not until later that these protests would be seen as parts of a larger movement. On February 19, 2009, in a broadcast from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, CNBC market commentator Rick Santelli, criticized the government's plan to refinance mortgages as "promoting bad behavior", and raised the possibility of a "Chicago Tea Party."[70] Within hours, websites such as

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[68] Laura Ruane, "Those outside Harborside in Fort Myers had plenty to see, say," *News-press.com*, February 11, 2009, http://www.news-press.com/article/20090211/OBAMA/90210068/Those-outside-Harborside-in-Fort-Myers-had-plenty-to-see-say; Andrea King, "You can't keep a good Tea Party down!," *WorldNetDaily*, March 30, 2009, http://www.wnd.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=93372.
[69] Patrik Jonsson, "Arguing the size of the "tea party" protest," *CSMonitor.com*, April 18, 2009, http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2009/0418/p25s03-usgn.html.
[70] "Rick Santelli's Shout Heard 'Round the World," *CNBC.com*, February 22, 2009,

ChicagoTeaParty.com and reTeaParty.com were live and recording large amounts of traffic. This culminated in the “Nation-Wide Chicago Tea Party”, held on February 27, 2009 with over 40 protests in various places throughout the nation. The Tea Party movement was born.

The Tax Day Tea Parties represented the next stage in the movement’s development. These protests were labeled the Tax Day Tea Parties because they occurred on April 15, 2009, the official deadline for filling an income tax return. A large number of protests occurred all across the county. By some estimates there were protests in more than 750 cities.[71] But it is difficult to determine exactly how many people attended the protests. Counting the turnout became politicized as authorities, organizers, and attendees often came up with drastically different counts.[72] At any rate, this wave of protests represented the largest showing of support for the Tea Parties to date.

The movement entered its next stage when it hosted the Taxpayer March on Washington. Held on September 12, 2009, this march was hailed by some as the largest conservative demonstration ever held in the nation’s capital. Estimates place the turnout between 10,000 to 75,000 protestors. FreedomWorks was the primary sponsor for the event, spending an estimated

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http://www.cnbc.com/id/29283701/Rick_Santelli_s_Shout_Heard_Round_the_World.

[71] Liz Robbins, “Tax Day Is Met With Tea Parties,” *NYTimes.com*, April 15, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/16/us/politics/16taxday.html?_r=3&ref=your-money%3e.

[72] Thomas Jonsson, “Arguing the size of the "tea party" protest.”

$600,000 on permitting and logistics.[73] Organizers cited the march as proof positive of the political strength of the Tea Party movement.[74]

The Tea Party Movement began with an angry protest in Fort Meyers, Florida that prompted hundreds of demonstrations across the nation and culminated in what could be safely called the largest conservative demonstration in held in Washington D.C. But what does this tell us about the goals of the movement? People affiliated with the movement are constantly trying to sell the image of an organic collective where tens of thousands of people across the country have come together to express a general dissatisfaction with the direction of the government policy. For example, Mark Williams, a conservative talk show host and a chairman of a political action committee sponsoring some of the Tea Party demonstrations, said, "Where the real problem comes in, is that – because it's so organic – if you ask 1,000 people what this should be, you'll get general agreement on the broader theme that we have to get the government back under control, but you're going to get 1,000 different answers on the specifics".[75] The picture Williams painted resembled a classic populist movement where members were filled with anger and dissatisfaction with the way that the "ordinary" person was treated by powerful elites. How are we to identify the demands of the movement when all of the members brandish placards complaining about issues as diverse as fiscal policy and abortion?

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[73] Kenneth Vogel, "A March, But is it a Movement?," *Politico.com*, September 12, 2009, http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0909/27058_Page2.html.
[74] Kenneth Vogel, "Tea partiers turn on each other," *Politico.com*, November 20, 2009, http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1109/29744.html.
[75] Vogel, "A March, But is it a Movement?."

A political theorist named Ernesto Laclau has produced a useful model for analyzing populist movements. According to Laclau, the smallest unit in the analysis of popular movements was the demand, not the group. Demands were constitutive of the people. There was no pre-existing group or social structure to which demands might have been attributed. For Laclau the only thing that unified the group was the aggregation of social demands that could be crystallized into social practices. A universal demand was formed when particular demands linked up through chains of equivalences. Here the universal demand functioned as a floating or empty signifier that could be filled with any content.[76]

The Tea Parties could easily fit into Laclau's model. The name of the protests, the Tea Parties, is a reference to the Boston Tea Party, a signature moment in the American Revolution. Calling the protests Tea Parties was likely an attempt by the organizers and promoters to evoke images and slogans from the American Revolution. For many people, the American Revolution is a symbol for freedom because it tells the story of a small resourceful colony fighting and defeating a larger and more powerful imperial power in the name of liberty. Thus the Tea Party movement, because of it connotations with the Boston Tea Party and the American Revolution, becomes a synecdoche for the idea of freedom. Now the Tea Party can operate as an empty signifier that can be invested with any protester's grievance as long as he or she believes they are fighting over freedom. This might explain why protestors from the original demonstrations in February held placards and made statements mostly about fiscal conservatism,

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[76] Ernesto Laclau, *On populist reason* (Verso Books, 2005).

yet the Taxpayer March seemed to have a heavier element of religious and social conservatism.[77]

This model might even explain the movement's tenuous affiliation with the Republican Party. Republican political strategist, Craig Shirley, compared the Tea Parties to Ronald Reagan's failed 1976 president bid in reinventing the GOP. "At that point, the Republican Party was essentially an empty vessel, and the movement took its ideas and poured them into it… What we're seeing today is somewhat analogous, but all they're doing so far is anti-liberalism, which doesn't necessarily have a political philosophy or an agenda of its own".[78] According to Laclau, the individual demands in a populist movement come together to form a chain of equivalences because they are each individually not satisfied by the social-political establishment, or hegemony. When the chain is formed, the current hegemony provides the contours of movement's ideological frontier. Thus, what a populist movement is for is determined in the last instance by what they are against. The Tea Parties are not "for" Republicans anymore than they are "for" Democrats. For Laclau, all hegemonies are temporary. Eventually, once the movement has created a new hegemony, a new set of demands will form a new chain of equivalences and the Tea Party movement will begin to fracture. The beginnings of this process may already be seen in the squabbles and turf battles between varying factions of the movement.[79]

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[77] Vogel, "A March, But is it a Movement?."
[78] Ibid.
[79] Jim Vandehei and Alex Isenstadt, "Conservatives take aim at leaders, Charlie Crist, other races," *Politico.com*, November 2, 2009,

It is clear that there are many individuals involved in the protests that do not view themselves as part of a corporate lobbying effort. Even so, it is important not to underestimate the influence of large organizations in shaping the direction of these protests. FreedomWorks and other national-level conservative groups seem to have organized hundreds to thousands of the Tea Parties. Organizers admit that FreedomWorks staffers coordinated conference calls among protesters, contacted conservative activists to give them "sign ideas, sample press releases, and a map of events around the country." FreedomWorks also provided how-to guides for delivering a "clear message" to the public and media.[80] Given the heavy involvement of national level conservative groups in organizing the Tea Parties, we should expect them to control much of the movement's message. But it would be inaccurate to declare that FreedomWorks and the conservative fronts control the Tea Party Movement. FreedomWorks promotes a traditionally fiscally conservative message but the movement seems to have expanded its program.[81] Even if the protests are Astroturf, it does not follow that they cannot be populist movements in Laclau's sense of the term. For Laclau, radical democracy is the essence of politics.[82]

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http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1109/29008.html; Vogel, "Tea partiers turn on each other."

[80] Lee Fang, "Spontaneous Uprising? Corporate Lobbyists Helping To Orchestrate Radical Anti-Obama Tea Party Protests," *Think Progress*, April 9, 2009, http://thinkprogress.org/2009/04/09/lobbyists-planning-teaparties/; Chris Good, "Palin To Address Tea Party Convention," *The Atlantic* (online, January 7, 2010), sec. Politics, http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2010/01/palin-to-address-tea-party-convention/33122/.

[81] Vogel, "Tea partiers turn on each other."

[82] Laclau, *On populist reason*.

Laclau's theory about radical democratic politics is just one of many theoretical approaches that could be applied to the Tea Party Movement. As stated in introduction, there are on-going debates about the nature of social movements in the communications, sociology, and political science fields. All of these approaches illuminate different aspects of social movements and afford different perspective. Scholars of social movements should not wed themselves to the tools of a particular discipline. In that spirit, chapters that follow will investigate various aspects of the Tea Party Movement by employing aspects of theories from the communications, sociology, political science, and political theory disciplines. However, special emphasis will be placed on rhetorical studies, since the goal of this project is to contribute to rhetorical theory on social movements. The next chapter will conduct a rhetorical analysis of speeches delivered by potential leaders in the Tea Party, with a special focus on the speakers at the National Tea Party Convention. These speeches will be examined through the lens of public communication strategy that is consistent with previous scholarly literature concerning radical conservative movements, namely, prophetic discourse.

Chapter 3: The Prophetic Voice in the Rhetoric of Tea Party Movement

The central question of this project is whether the rhetoric of the Tea Party Movement is significantly different from what we currently understand about the rhetoric of radical conservative movements. Whether viewed from the prospective of ideological protest movements, value-oriented movements, or right-wing extremist movements, radical conservative movements employ grand historical narratives that emphasize moralistic struggle between at least two classes. These grand narratives simplify historical events, caricature social actors, and prescribe courses of action, frequently through the lens of religious rhetoric. While the field of rhetorical studies has identified multiple approaches to religious rhetoric, one perspective, the prophetic tradition, seems particularly relevant to the first three keynote speakers at the Tea Party Movement's national convention.

This chapter will analyze the discourse of prominent figures in Tea Party Movement for the adoption of the prophetic voice. It will begin by identifying key rhetorical figures in the movement that have prominent standing with the Tea Party membership. Afterwards, it will demonstrate how these speakers relied on the prophetic tradition as a key feature of their public communication strategies.

Key Figures in the Tea Party

The rhetors analyzed here will include all of the keynote speakers at the National Tea Party Convention (the final speaker will be excluded for reasons specified later). Tom Tancredo delivered the kick-off address on February 4, 2010. Tancredo is a former member of the United States House of

Representatives from the sixth district of Colorado. Tancredo is best known for his opposition to illegal immigration. He founded the Congressional Immigration Reform Caucus and served as its chairman for eight years until he stepped down in 2007. Tancredo has supported various proposals for restricting illegal immigration as well as a three-year moratorium on legal immigration to allow the immigrants that are already here time to adjust to "American culture."[83] Joseph Farah, an outspoken critic of the Obama administration and editor of World Net Daily, an online conservative tabloid, gave a keynote address on February 4, 2010. Andrew Breitbart gave a keynote address on February 5, 2010. Breitbart is a commentator for the Washington Times, and an editor for the Drudge Report website. He runs various news aggregation sites including, breitvart.tv, Big Hollywood, Big Government and Big Journalism.

The chapter will also feature two potential leaders in the movement who were not featured at the convention. Glenn Beck is an American conservative radio and television host, political commentator, author, and entrepreneur. His provocative and often polarizing views have afforded him media recognition and popularity within the Tea Party Movement. Beck has promoted the movement on his cable news show on Fox News Channel. He has served as the final speaker at several Tea Party rallies around the country. Some label him the leader of the socially conservative fringe of the movement.[84]

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[83] "The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR): Rep. Tancredo Introduces an Immigration Moratorium Bill," http://www.fairus.org/site/PageServer?pagename=research_researchb210.
[84] Vogel, "A March, But is it a Movement?."

The other speaker featured that did not participate in the convention is Ron Paul. Paul is a Republican Congressman for the 14th congressional district of Texas. He is generally an outspoken critic of American foreign and monetary policy. His right-libertarian views have caused him to clash with both Republican and Democratic Party leaders. He has run for President of the United States twice, once as nominee of the Libertarian Party and once as a candidate for the Republican nomination. He has served as the final speaker at several Tea Party rallies and some label him the leader of the fiscally conservative wing of the Tea Party Movement.[85]

Use of the Prophetic Voice

Prophetic discourse is intimately related to the radical rhetoric of reform in American history. Prophetic discourse implies, "a sense of mission, a desire to bring the practice of people into accord with a sacred principle, and an uncompromising, often excoriating stance toward a reluctant audience."[86] Prophetic discourse is grounded in a religious heritage specifically rooted in the Old Testament. Taken together, scholars of the prophetic discourse tradition focusws on four important questions when analyzing prophetic rhetoric: in what context did the rhetoric originate; how did the prophets announce their presence to the people; what was the character of the covenant between God and the people; and what was the role of the people in fulfilling the covenant?[87]

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[85] Ibid.
[86] James Darsey, *The prophetic tradition and radical rhetoric in America* (NYU Press, 1997), 40.
[87] Darsey, *The prophetic tradition and radical rhetoric in America*; Margaret Zulick, "The Agon of Jeremiah: On the Dialogic Invention of Prophetic Ethos,"

Prophecy and Crisis

Prophetic rhetoric tends to appear in times of crisis. A crisis threatens the self-identity of the people in relation to God.[88] According to Ben Witherington: "The prophet's role is to encourage people to accept the loss of the old order and the structures that have been created to support it."[89] The advent of the Tea Party Movement, as well as the impetus for the prophetic rhetoric employed by its activists, can be traced to a distinct event: the financial crisis of 2007 to present.

Since 2008, the United States and the rest of the world have been in the grips of the greatest economic recession since the Great Depression. Commonly referred to as the "financial crisis," this economic tailspin was triggered by a liquidity shortfall in the United States banking system caused by overvaluation of assets. This "crisis" resulted in the collapse of large financial institutions, downturns in stock markets across the world, and the initiation of interventions by national governments to rescue additional banks from insolvency. While there was substantial disagreement among economic authorities regarding the proper solution to the nation's economic woes, widespread agreement existed as to the severity of the problem. In the fall of 2008, President George W. Bush admitted, "We're in the midst of a serious financial crisis, and the federal government is

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Quarterly Journal of Speech 78, no. 2 (1992): 125-148; Alan Phillips, "Prophecy and law," *Israel's Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd*: 217-32; Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and change: An anatomy of purpose* (Univ of California Pr, 1984).

[88] Darsey, *The prophetic tradition and radical rhetoric in America*, 23.

[89] Ben. Witherington, *Jesus the seer: the progress of prophecy* (Hendrickson Pub, 1999), 404.

responding with decisive action."[90] Politicians, pundits, and analysts across the country concurred that the collapse of the housing bubble rocked the economic foundation of the country.

The Obama administration's response to this crisis provided the backdrop for the Tea Party Movement's emergence. On February 19th, 2009, Rick Santelli, an on-air editor for the CNBC Business News Network, engaged in a heated rant decrying administration's mortgage bailout plan. Santelli claimed Obama was stealing tax dollars from the majority of the responsible citizens in America in order to keep irresponsible people in houses that they could not afford. In order to protest this policy, and others of the Obama administration, Santelli declared, "We are thinking of having a Chicago Tea Party in July. All you capitalists that want to show up to Lake Michigan, I am going to start organizing."[91] Santelli's "shout heard 'round the world"[92] is considered the birth of the Tea Party Movement. Locally organized protests sporting the Tea Party label sprang up across the country protesting what participants felt to be the unwise economic policies of the Obama administration and the Democratic Congress.

As the movement evolved over time, it began to incorporate different ideological strains, most of them socially conservative. As people who believed that the goals of the movement were broader than economic reform began to swell the movement's ranks, the description of America's crisis morphed. A

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[90] George. W Bush, "President George W. Bush's Address Regarding the Economic Crisis," *About.com*, January 3, 2009, http://uspolitics.about.com/od/gwbush/a/bush_economy.htm.
[91] "Rick Santelli's Shout Heard 'Round the World."
[92] Ibid.

growing number of American citizens viewed the economic meltdown as a consequence of a general march toward the left that would leave the country in ruins. An analysis of the rhetoric of prominent Tea Party activists revealed a consistent description of this new social crisis. Tancredo used a metaphor of a frog cooking slowly in a pot to describe America's slow march to the left:

> It seemed as though we were doomed to experience the political equivalent of the proverbial frog in the water syndrome. Every year, the liberal Dems and RINO Republicans turned the temp up ever so slightly till it seemed we would all be boiled to death in the cauldron of the nanny state. And then… Obama… immediately turned up the heat under that cauldron so high and so quick that people started jumping out of the water all over the place.[93]

Farrah employed the exact same metaphor in his speech:

> Have you ever heard the story about the frog, sitting in the pot, on top of the burner. And in the beginning, the frog is enjoying the warm balmy temperature. He's not noticing that it's getting hotter and hotter. And by the time it gets unbearable for the frog, he's cooked! He's immobilized, he can't jump out, it's too late for him. And it is my theory that American's have been that frog in the pot for at least the last 20 years.[94]

Both speakers agreed that a recent crisis in leadership had provided the impetus for patriotic Americans to recognize their perilous condition. Until the movement

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[93] Tom Tancredo, "Thank God John McCain Lost! Here's why." (presented at the National Tea Party Convention, Opryland Hotel, Nashville, TN, February 4, 2010), http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/2445943/posts.
[94] Joseph Farrah, "Joseph Farrah's Address to the First National Tea Party Convention" (presented at the National Tea Party Convention, Opryland Hotel, Nashville, TN, February 4, 2010), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrAwia_kE5I&feature=related.

stepped in, America was moving quickly down the road to "bigger government and less freedom."[95]

In traditional prophetic discourse, prophets are very critical of the people. Prophets have to convince the people that the crisis they experience is the result of their failure to adhere to the dictates of the divine covenant between God and His people. For this reason, prophets often use metaphors of drunkenness or sleep to describe the people's role in creating the crisis. When the Tea Party prophets were describing the crisis of too much government involvement, they too, were forced to explain ways in which the people violated the covenant. Tancredo and Farrah described the people as relaxing for decades in a nice balmy bath that was slowly cooking them alive. In his Tax Day Tea Party speech, Glenn Beck described the people as slumbering and ignoring gathering foreign threats: "On 9/11, we were asleep. You know, on 9/10, we chose to ignore those problems. On 9/11 we were asleep and we were afraid. Well. On 9/12, without anybody saying, 'Be good to each other,' we just were. We don't have to be told how to act. We are naturally those people."[96] Beck was describing the way the people allowed the country to descend into incivility before the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center.

In his Tax Day Tea Party speech, Paul echoed the other speakers by arguing that the country had fallen into such dire straits because the people had

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[95] Tom Tancredo, "Thank God John McCain Lost! Here's why.," February 4, 2010, http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/2445943/posts.
[96] Glenn Beck, "Glenn Beck's speech at Alamo Tea Party," *YouTube*, April 15, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4OvuuhtRQ0.

been asleep. Unlike Beck, however, he focused on the consequences of the public's inattention into the economic realm.

> The budget is horrible, the Congress is horrible, they're spending, they don't hesitate for one minute. But there are good things happening in the country and you're part of it. People have finally awakened. They have finally found out that if they speak out, maybe they will have some influence. Washington has not responded to the people because the people basically have been quiet.[97]

Again, the people were able to wake themselves from their own slumber in order to correct the wrongs that they had committed and renewed the covenant in the process.

Breitbart also employed the slumber metaphor when he described the ways in which the people had violated the covenant by allowing politicians and the mainstream media to do as they pleased:

> I think the last twenty years, everyone in this room benefited from the peace dividend after the fall of the Soviet Union, and we kind of sleep-walked through our lives. We became consumerists […] And I think many of us feel, to a great extent, it's not just the government that is to blame, and it's not just the media that is to blame. Many of us are to blame as well because we didn't take our civic duties as seriously as we should have […] We allowed for them to get out of control, but we're telling them that we are awake, and we now have the tools to take them on.[98]

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[97] Ron Paul, "Ron Paul's Tea Party Speech," *RonPaul.com*, April 15, 2010, http://www.ronpaul.com/2010-04-15/ron-pauls-speech-at-the-tea-party-in-washington-dc/.

[98] Andrew Breitbart, "Breitbart's Keynote Address To The First National Tea Party Convention," *Big Government*, February 5, 2010, http://biggovernment.com/amarcus/2010/02/09/breitbarts-full-length-keynote-address-to-the-first-national-tea-party-convention/.

All five of the speakers argued that crisis originated, in part, because the people had fallen asleep, or otherwise neglected their duties. They depicted the members of the Tea Party Movement as followers who had lost, but could still find, their way.

All the speakers also explained that the people had awoken from their own slumber and began to correct the wrongs they had committed. The people experienced a temporary fall from grace that left open the possibility of redemption. Farrah and Tancredo argued that the people had been metaphorically resting in the boiling pot, but they were eventually able to recognize their situation and took action to address their plight. Beck argued the day after the 9/11 attacks the people were able to wake themselves from their stupor and accord themselves with decency and respect.

In the prophetic tradition, the primary source of the danger brought on by the crisis is those who hold a deliberate commitment to a countercovenant.[99] While the people may have fallen temporarily from grace, they were never as heretical as Obama, "a committed socialist ideologue."[100] Labeling Obama and other liberal politicians as socialists, natural enemies of freedom, weak on national defense, and unscrutinized by the media, depicted the movement's followers in a positive light by comparison.

Tea Party prophets used the people's anxiety about the economy in order to rhetorically construct a broader social crisis with economic implications. They

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[99] Kenneth Burke, *The rhetoric of religion: Studies in logology* (Univ of California Pr on Demand, 1970), 194.
[100] Tancredo, "Thank God John McCain Lost! Here's why.."

used the crisis to magnify the sins of the enemy and to mobilize the people to act in a way that would restore the covenant. But for the speakers to fulfill their role as prophets, they would have to announce themselves as such.

Announcing the Prophet

Prophetic speech comes from those authorized to speak in the name of God. Prophets essentially function as mouthpieces for the Almighty. As James Darsey put it: "Prophetic speech is incomprehensible except as the speech of a divine messenger; the prophet, properly understood, speaks for another."[101] In the Old Testament, prophets announced themselves as God's messengers by using the messenger formula, "Thus saith the Lord."[102] The messenger formula left no doubt from where the prophet's message originated.

In contemporary examples of prophetic discourse, prophets often refrain from revealing themselves directly as God's messengers. In a secularized society, such as the United States, where such messages are more likely to be criticized in the mass media, announcing one's self as the mouthpiece of God carries risk. Yet the importance of natural law (i.e. the law of nature handed down to humankind by God) to the American argument has been well documented. The movement's name is an allusion to the Boston Tea Party, a signature moment in the American Revolution where American radicals fought with the British government during the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century. The revolutionaries' cause was rooted in a preoccupation with the laws of nature and

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[101] Darsey, *The prophetic tradition and radical rhetoric in America*, 16.
[102] Michael Knibb, "Prophecy and the Emergence of the Jewish Apocalypses'," *Israel's Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd*: 155–80.

of nature's God. [103] Even though Tea Party activists did not invoke the divine explicitly, the rhetorical legacy of the American Revolution evokes the religious undertones characteristic of such discourse.

In some instances, prominent members of the Tea Party Movement have announced themselves as prophets explicitly. In his keynote address to the National Tea Party Convention, Joseph Farrah, explained how he had prophesied the advent of the movement:

> Way back in 2003, I wrote a book that literally prophesied this movement that you have created. It was called *Taking America Back*. And that's exactly what you are doing; that's the mission, that's the goal. And it's the most exciting development in American politics in my lifetime. Now I got even more specific in a book I wrote in 2008 called, *None of the Above*. And in that book I explained why neither major party candidate would change the failed course that America was on. And the only difference between the two candidates was the speed at which they would drive the country to the brink of bankruptcy and disillusionment. But more to the point, I explained what would happen, if Barack Obama were selected. I explained that the freight train he was driving would result in a major grassroots rebellion. Ordinary hardworking Americans, who have never marched in a protest, or attended a rally were going to get off their behinds and fill the streets. And you fulfilled that prediction.[104]

Farrah explicitly characterized himself as having the powers of a prophet, though he did not specify that he spoke the word of God. Throughout his speech, he provided hints to the audience, but he invited them to fill in the divine source of

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[103] Darsey, *The prophetic tradition and radical rhetoric in America*, 42.
[104] Farrah, "Joseph Farrah's Address to the First National Tea Party Convention."

the message for themselves. Farrah was speaking to a television audience, where his enthymematic appeal arguably broadened the appeal of his message.

Farrah went to great lengths to build his credibility as a prophet. In order to demonstrate a consistent ability to predict future events, he told his audience of two different predictions he made – one of which was long before the most recent election cycle, and the other was specific to the election of Barack Obama as president. Establishing that he was able to predict future events and that he was able to interpret complex series of events and produce specific and accurate forecasts bolstered his ethos. By stating that the audience had "fulfilled that prediction," Farrah was distinguishing himself from the audience based on insight.

Farrah set up his credibility to rest on more than the accuracy of his predictions. In a later portion of his speech where he argued the Jesus Christ had better documentation of his birth than Obama, Farrah quoted scripture in order to boost his prophetic credentials:

> In fact – look at your bibles – the first seventeen verses of Matthew are devoted to his genealogy, through the line of Mary. The next nine verses and the first verse of the second chapter are devoted to the who, what, where, when, and why of his birth. The rest of the second chapter is devoted to the actions of Joseph and Mary at protecting the young Jesus from efforts to put him to death. Likewise, the first fifteen verses of the third chapter of Luke are devoted are devoted to Jesus' genealogy, this time through the line of Joseph, as his adopted father. [105]

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[105] Ibid.

As if he were a reverend speaking to his congregation, Farrah identified specific verses in The Bible that provided genealogical information about Christ. Farrah's care with specific verses helped to demonstrate his mastery of the text specifically and God's word more generally. While he may not have announced himself as God's prophet directly, he invited the audience to assume the divine nature of his insights.

As I stated previously, not all of the keynote speakers and potential leaders announced themselves explicitly as prophets. Each of the five speakers, however, fulfilled the other rhetorical expectations of the prophetic voice. The most important of these expectations is reasserting the divine principles to the people.[106] Here, prophets act as a medium between God and his chosen people. In the case of the Tea Party Movement, prophets sometimes acted metaphorically as mediums between movement activists and the rest of the country. In a speech he delivered at a Tax Day Tea Party rally in San Antonio, Texas, Glenn Beck explained his role in the movement:

> But you know, I know it's really hard for the mainstream media to figure out what all these people that they belittle, that live outside of LA or Hollywood or Washington DC or New York, and not all the parts of New York, just the important, snotty parts of New York. So they continue to think that the Tax Day Tea parties are all about Barack Obama or they're all for the GOP. It's not because, you know, its not because they don't try to understand, I don't think they are capable of understanding. But since

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[106] Zulick, "The Agon of Jeremiah: On the Dialogic Invention of Prophetic Ethos," 137.

> the media and Stephen Colbert are watching, I'm going to speak very very slowly, and I'll explain.[107]

Beck explicitly positioned himself as a medium between the movement, the mainstream media, and the rest of the country. His role was to interpret the movement for the nation, because the media, "the people's" primary means of communication, was incapable of understanding. According to Darsey, "The prophet sees what we in our moral torpor cannot or will not see and hears what we either cannot or will not hear."[108] Beck went on to define the contours of the movement by stating a long list of grievances. This list included generational theft in the form of deficit spending, circumvention of the law by the rich and powerful, an irresponsible media, unfair tax burdens, and the circumvention of freedom of speech. This laundry list is consistent with the prophetic voice. Prophets are preoccupied with concepts of justice and equality.[109] As Huston Smith put it, "Stated abstractly, the Prophetic Principle can be put as follows: the prerequisite to political stability is social justice; it is ingrained in the nature of things that injustice breeds its down demise. In theological terms, Gods standards are high; he will not put up forever with exploitation, corruption, and mediocrity."[110] Beck fulfilled his prophetic function by arguing that the movement was in protest of the

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[107] Beck, "Glenn Beck's speech at Alamo Tea Party."
[108] Darsey, *The prophetic tradition and radical rhetoric in America*, 56.
[109] Arnie Madsen and Robert C. Chandler, "Prophets and Priests: Argument By and Before the Supreme Court.," in *Conference Proceedings -- National Communication Association/American Forensic Association (Alta Conference on Argumentation)* (National Communication Association, 1991), 365, http://ezproxy.gsu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=20750971&site=ehost-live.
[110] Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1965), 276.

exploitation of ordinary, hard-working Americans, and the corruption of government.

Paul hinted at the mediator function of the prophetic voice during a debate with other congressional candidates representing the Tea Party Movement. Paul was asked to define the phrase "we the people." During his answer he stated:

> But the people have to have leaders, and the leaders are the ones who influence the majority of the people. So there is something to be said that sometimes we the people are represented by leaders who understand what the Constitution is all about, what liberty is all about. And they represent we the people. That's why I think the Tea Party Movement is so important, because they are representing we the people even though they don't have 51% of the votes. It's a small group […] So I would say we the people are now having an influence on Washington.[111]

He defended the need for leaders in the movement who could influence the people because they really understood the terms of the covenant. These leaders would function as mediators between the divine word and the majority of the people just as prophets of the Old Testament.

While not all of the speakers explicitly identified themselves as mediators between the divine word and the people, or between the faithful and the rest of the country, mediator themes were consistent. In his keynote address, Breitbart criticized the universities and the media for their unfair liberal biases. He claimed that the media had systematically misrepresented the goals of the Tea Party Movement to the American people. Unlike Beck, he did not take it upon himself

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[111] Ron Paul, "Ron Paul in the Katy Tea Party Debate," *RonPaul.com*, February 20, 2010, http://www.ronpaul.com/2010-02-20/ron-paul-in-the-katy-tea-party-debate/.

to explain the movement to the media, but he called on members of the movement to become their own "counter-media" and to report the news that they cared about.[112] Breitbart would function as the leader of this "counter-media" and would continue to expose the liberal bias in coverage. All of these speakers preformed the primary function of prophets in that they attempted to interpret God's will, via natural law, to the people in order to mold values and provide imperatives for the future.

The Divine Covenant and the People

The divine principles referenced above constitute a covenant between the Almighty and His chosen people. The covenant functions as a treaty between God and the people that commits His followers to a certain set of behaviors.[113] The prophet's role is to demonstrate the ways in which the people have broken the covenant and call them to renew it. Prophets do not seek identification with their audience in the ways that traditional rhetorical theory has stated. Prophets do not try to meet the audience where they are; instead, prophets achieve identification only when the people have come to God.[114]

Popular sovereignty, or the notion that the legitimacy of the government rests on the will of the people, became the central principle in the covenant of the Tea Party Movement. The movement's name itself is an illusion to the American

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[112] Andrew Breitbart, "Andrew Breitbart's Address to the First National Tea Party Convention" (Speech presented at the National Tea Party Convention, Opryland Hotel, Nashville, TN, February 5, 2010), http://biggovernment.com/amarcus/2010/02/09/breitbarts-full-length-keynote-address-to-the-first-national-tea-party-convention/.
[113] Phillips, "Prophecy and law," 219.
[114] Darsey, *The prophetic tradition and radical rhetoric in America*, 22.

Revolution. The covenant of the American Revolution relied heavily on the idea of popular sovereignty. This covenant stated that the only purpose of government was to defend the inalienable rights demanded by natural law. Any usurpation of those rights constituted tyranny, and thus American colonists were obligated by natural law to revolt.[115] The Tea Party Movement relied on its historical namesake to serve as a model for its own divine covenant.

In a speech delivered at a Tax Day Tea Party in Washington D.C., Paul lamented the violation of the covenant by tyrannical government: "What we need is a strong Congress to rein in the executive branch and the courts to get back to a constitutional government."[116] In his view, in order to return to a constitutional government consistent with the value of popular sovereignty, we would need to restrain the abuses of a "runaway government." The road to redemption lied with a Congress strong enough to enforce the will of the people. He went on to explain the terms of the covenant:

> The role of government is to protect our liberties. And if we protect our liberties, then the free people can take care of themselves. Get rid of all these taxes and all these regulations and all these government controls and needless wars. The purpose of liberty is to allow a free people to be creative, to release the creative energy that we need, and also to strive for excellence and virtue; that's what life is all about.[117]

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[115] Ibid., 42.
[116] Paul, "Ron Paul's Tea Party Speech."
[117] Ibid.

The covenant's primary function was to protect the liberty of individuals. Liberty was treated as the highest value among Tea Party prophets because the people's freedom was a natural right dictated by God. The covenant allowed freedom to be regulated to maintain an orderly society, but it could never be abrogated, or not social contract was void.

The other speakers also set up the ideas of popular sovereignty and liberty enshrined in the Constitution as the primary aspects of the covenant. During his keynote speech at the National Tea Party Convention, Farrah explained the way the Constitution functioned as the covenant: "The Constitution is the glue that holds us together, that binds us as a people, and as a nation-state. And we abrogate it and abuse it at our great peril."[118] Later, he explained exactly what he thought the Constitution meant through a series of questions in which he waited for the appropriate responses from the audience.

> Does the constitution mean what it says? Does it actually limit what the Federal Government and the Congress can do? […] Can congress constitutionally require Americans to buy medical insurance? Does Obama have the power to constitutionally appoint unaccountable czars to rule over every aspect of our lives? Does Congress have the power to kill or inhibit freedom of speech talk radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh? Do we have a right to bear arms or not? You passed the test. So what's wrong with being obsessed with the Constitution? Without it America ceases to be America.[119]

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[118] Farrah, "Joseph Farrah's Address to the First National Tea Party Convention."
[119] Ibid.

He predicted, in a prophetic fashion, that violating the covenant would result in "great peril." All of questions that he asked regarded what he viewed as violations of freedom, be it economic freedom, domestic freedom, freedom of speech, or the freedom to bear arms. Clearly liberty operated as the controlling value.[120]

While almost every speech delivered by prominent Tea Party activists made an implicit reference to the Constitution and liberty, the movement's covenant was often described in broader terms. Tea Party speakers often invoked conservative values at they same time they emphasized the importance of the Constitution. The Tea Party speakers touted protecting and promoting conservative values, for the protection of American culture, as a secondary goal of the movement. In these instances, conservative value systems functioned as a portion of the covenant. After his completed his pre-scripted address, Tancredo exclaimed to an excited audience, "We really do have a culture to pass on to our children: it's based on Judaeo-Christian values." "This is our country," he declared. "Let's take it back! Cultures are not the same. Some are better. Ours is best!"[121] America's covenant required adherence to a cultural code based a religious tradition. Tancredo fulfilled his prophetic function by calling the people to embrace the faith of that tradition.

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[120] Tancredo, "Thank God John McCain Lost! Here's why.."
[121] Devin Burghart, "Revival and Revolt: Inside the Tea Party Nation Convention," *Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights*, February 11, 2010, http://www.irehr.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=52:revival-and-revolt-inside-the-tea-party-nation-convention&catid=10:analysis&Itemid=23.

Farrah also emphasized the importance of cultural values to the covenant. However, Farrah used abstract language to allow the audience to fill in the content of American culture:

> If this movement is to last, we need a long term strategy to do what our enemies have done over the last 100 years: take over, not only the political institutions, but the cultural institutions, like the press, the entertainment business, the schools, the universities, and yes, even the churches. It's our duty then, those of us who believe in God, liberty, security and responsibility: what he represents and only he represents; And begin a process of what I call reverse-Gramscism… it is not a time for timidity or compromise, it's not a time for defensiveness or conciliation. It's time to take the offense in this struggle.[122]

Farrah's conception of the covenant required Americans who believed in God, liberty, security, and responsibility to engage in a culture war with the political left. Prophetic scholars maintained the sacred covenant was beyond compromise. Darsey argued that prophetic discourse is not reasonable. Prophets cannot change the divine word based on circumstance or opportunistic reading because God's will is immutable and altering the message would be a violation of His sacred trust.[123] Though each speaker who emphasized the importance of cultural values had slightly different conceptions about what those values entailed, the notion that the faithful shared in a specific cultural tradition the norm for the speakers who described the covenant's tenets.

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[122] Farrah, "Joseph Farrah's Address to the First National Tea Party Convention."
[123] Darsey, *The prophetic tradition and radical rhetoric in America*, 20.

The Role of the Chosen People

In prophetic discourse, the role of God's chosen people is to sacrifice in order to fulfill the obligations of the covenant. As Darsey put it, "The prophet demands that the people give up their worldly comforts and follow him into the purity of the wilderness."[124] God's message cannot be abridged in order to meet the demands of the people; the people must always subjugate themselves before His will.

Two types of sacrifice were typical in the discourse emanating from the Tea Party Movement. The first type of sacrifice involved the people giving up common comforts and luxuries in order to win the most important fights. During his speech, Beck explained to his audience that they would need to make sacrifices if the movement was to be successful: "We all have to be prepared to lose everything. Okay? So, we lose our job. Oh well. Okay, we lose our house. Oh well. Okay? It's gonna be tough. Oh well. We know how the story ends […] We just need to reconnect and realize that no matter what – no matter what we lose – it's gonna be okay."[125] For Beck, sacrifice was necessary because if the movement succeeded in restraining the spending habits of the government, many people might find it harder to survive financially in the short-term. Government programs designed to support poor and middle class citizens might be cut. Preserving the values of the Constitution was ultimately more important to the well being of the people than physical provisions for their survival.

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[124] Ibid., 27.
[125] Beck, "Glenn Beck's speech at Alamo Tea Party."

The second type of sacrifice involved fighting in the name of the covenant. The people's role was not simply to obey the laws of the covenant; they were obligated to defend it against any threat.[126] After his keynote address to the National Tea Party Convention, Scarborough distributed a pamphlet for his new campaign, the Mandate to Save America. The pamphlet read, "We, the undersigned, and millions of other American patriots, including many who comprise the growing TEA Party movement, are no less determined than patriots of the past, who fought for our freedom. We will make any sacrifice, endure any hardship, and confront any foe to keep the flame of freedom burning bright; so help us God."[127] Scarborough directly equated the willingness to fight any enemy of freedom as a form of sacrifice. He invoked the memory of those who fought in the American Revolution to convey the commitment and devotion expected of the followers of the covenant.

Farrah not only equated fighting the members of the counter-covenant to sacrifice, he suggested cultural warfare as a specific form of activism. During his keynote address, Farrah told the audience that they would pursue means beyond the polls to ensure the lasting success of the movement: "Electing the best politicians will never be enough. Are you with me on that? Are you ready to engage in a culture war after we take back Congress in November?"[128] While a culture war is presumably less violent than the American Revolution, Farrah still described the obligations of the people in terms of a struggle with an adversary.

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[126] Darsey, *The prophetic tradition and radical rhetoric in America*, 48.
[127] Burghart, "IREHR."
[128] Farrah, "Joseph Farrah's Address to the First National Tea Party Convention."

The idea of struggle with a foe as sacrifice was consistent for almost all of the speakers. But unlike the other speakers, Breitbart did not explicitly call on the audience to combat the forces of evil. Instead, he depicted members of the movement as already locked in a struggle with the mainstream media. In his keynote address, Breitbart began his speech by saying, "I am glad that we are all here. I am glad that we have all survived the main-stream media's onslaught, on our movement."[129] If it was true that the media tried to attack with movement by depicting its members as racist extremists, then it was only natural for protestors to fight back against this foe.

Summary and Conclusions

The speakers examined here adopted many elements of the prophetic voice on behalf of the Tea Party Movement. They described a crisis in which the steady expansion of government threatened to destroy, not just the country's economic strength, but its moral fiber and security as well. The crisis emerged both because of the acts of individuals dedicated to an evil socialists counter-covenant, and because the people had temporarily neglected their duties to uphold God's covenant. This covenant consisted of ideas about popular sovereignty, individual liberty, and socially conservative values. In order to uphold the covenant the people were asked to sacrifice; both in terms of giving up their worldly, material comforts, and fighting any enemy who threatened the covenant. Like the traditional prophets of the Old Testament, the prophets of the

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[129] Breitbart, "Andrew Breitbart's Address to the First National Tea Party Convention."

Tea Party Movement criticized the people for temporarily moving away from the covenant, and praised them when they decided to follow the path to redemption.

On the surface, leading a populist movement would seem to be inconsistent with speakers choosing to employing the prophetic voice. Populist movements value “the will of the people” above all else while the prophet unreservedly casts the will of God as the uncompromising authority. Yet the rhetoric of the Tea Party prophets easily resolved this tension. By attributing the origin of the crisis to the people’s slumber, they were able to criticize the people without claiming that they needed to change their will or submit themselves to anyone. The Tea Party Prophet did not call upon the people to change their behavior, he applauded them for remembering what they wanted all along.

This chapter analyzed the speeches of prominent Tea Party figures including, but not limited to, all of the keynote speakers at the first-ever National Tea Party Convention with one exception – Sarah Palin, the final speaker at the convention. This speaker was excluded from this analysis because her speech did not conform to the expectations of the prophetic tradition. In fact, her speech bore very few similarities to the other keynote address delivered earlier at the convention. Chapter five will be reserved for exclusively examining her speech, and the situational exigency she faced. The next chapter will continue the focus on the Tea Party Movement leaders more generally, examining another public communication strategy recurrent within radical conservative protest movements, namely, conspiracy discourse.

Chapter *4: Conspiracy Discourse in the Rhetoric of the Tea Party Movement*

While there is substantial debate regarding the prevalence of conspiracy discourse in the political and cultural mainstream of America, there is little doubt that conspiracy theories are frequently deployed in radical conservative movements.[130] A conspiracy theory, as defined by Brian Keeley, is, "a proposed explanation of some historical event (or events) in terms of the significant causal agency of a relatively small group of persons – the conspirators – acting in secret."[131] Though it is true that conspiracies can and do happen, most conspiracy theories cannot be verified because they are a product of political moralism taken to the extreme. As Lipset and Raab put it, "[…] if every historical moment at every stage is almost exclusively a matter of good will or ill will, freely chosen, those who make a mistake are not just wrong; they are evil. And all our social and political pathologies are the result of deliberate evil doing. Given the moralistic premise, how else could we account for them?"[132] Conspiracy theories constitute a large portion of the rhetorical behavior that Richard Hofstadter called the "Paranoid Style."[133] "The Paranoid Style" involves a feeling of persecution or resentment. This is why Hofstadter typically associated this style with

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[130] Lipset and Raab, *The politics of unreason: right wing extremism in America, 1790-1970*; Windt, *Presidents and protesters: Political rhetoric in the 1960s*; R. Hofstadter, "The paranoid style in American politics," *Harper's Magazine* 229, no. 1374 (1964): 77-86.
[131] Brian Keeley, "Of conspiracy theories," *The Journal of Philosophy* 96, no. 3 (1999): 51.
[132] Lipset and Raab, *The politics of unreason: right wing extremism in America, 1790-1970*, 14.
[133] Hofstadter, "The paranoid style in American politics."

conservative movements in America; a key tenant of radical conservative movements is the belief that a change in the social order has resulted, or will result, in the loss of prestige or power for relatively well-established groups.[134]

Recently, the idea that conspiracy theory is a trait reserved for radical or extreme groups has been challenged. Goodnight and Poulakos have argued that theories of conspiracy rhetoric needed to be revisited because the controversies surrounding the Nixon trial and other public issues brought conspiracy discourse into the political mainstream.[135] Mark Fenster argued that the incorporation of conspiracy theories into the American mainstream was not a new development at all, but part of a long political tradition:

> […] the prevalence of conspiracy theories is not necessarily external or pernicious to American politics and culture, but instead an integral aspect of American, and perhaps modern, and post-modern life. Not simple and outlying "style" of American politics, conspiracy theory has always been and a significant aspect of American political rhetoric, with wide-ranging, often salutary effects.[136]

But even if conspiracy theory is not exclusively the province of extremist movements, most conspiracy theories are rooted in a degree of political moralism and monism that is consistent with the tradition of radicalism in America. All three of the approaches to study of radical conservative movements highlighted in

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[134] Lipset and Raab, *The politics of unreason: right wing extremism in America, 1790-1970*.
[135] G. Thomas Goodnight and John Poulakos, "Conspiracy Rhetoric: From Pragmatism to Fantasy in Public Discourse.," *Western Journal of Speech Communication: WJSC* 45, no. 4 (Fall1981 1981): 302.
[136] Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy theories: Secrecy and power in American culture* (Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2008), 9.

chapter one (ideological protest movements, right-wing extremist movements, and value-oriented movements) mention conspiracy theory as an important aspect of the radical voice in social movements. Moreover, conspiracy theory has played a role of varied importance in many populist movements because its preoccupation with secret elite domination over and manipulation of the entirety of economic, political, and social relations. I believe conspiracy theories are used in the Tea Party Movement in ways that distinguish the movement from the political mainstream.

In order to determine the ways in which conspiracy discourse is used in the Tea Party movement, I will examine the rhetoric of the speakers at the National Tea Party Convention. I will focus exclusively on the rhetoric emanating from the convention because that is the place where conspiracy discourse was most likely to flourish in the movement. Fenster described conspiracy theory as "a reckoning by those who consider themselves to be outside the centers of power with what is deemed to be an inaccessible, essentially opaque political and social order […] it offers particular pleasures and opportunities to play, as well as the promise of social interaction, community, and political involvement that it ultimately cannot deliver […] it expresses a longing for involvement, a desire for political meaning and significance on the part of the political subject." The National Convention set the Tea Party up to evolve from a series of local protests scattered across the country to a national level movement capable to producing large-scale change. In short, the National Convention represented a desire for the Tea Party Movement to become something "more." In this context,

conspiracy theory figures to be a prominent theme in the convention proceedings.

This chapter will feature some of the speakers from the previous chapter with one addition. This includes World-Net Daily owner, Joseph Farrah; media-mogul, Andrew Breitbart; and former House Representative Tom Tancredo. The new addition is Steve Milloy, who addressed the convention on February 4, 2010. Milloy is a Fox News commentator dedicated to debunking what he labels "junk science" or faulty scientific data and analysis. Milloy has addressed what he believes are false scientific claims regarding global warming, ozone depletion and the health effects of second-hand smoke. The chapter will analyze these speeches while paying special attention to what rhetorical scholars agree are the three characteristics of conspiracy theories: disputing the official story; the evil intent of the conspirators; and the endless circle of interpretation.[137]

Deviating from the Official Script

Conspiracy theories attempt to explain some important historical or contemporary event in a way that contradicts the mainstream interpretation of that event. The notion that there has been a cover-up by some group of people is often perceived as the most damning piece of evidence supporting the existence of a conspiracy. When there is no explicit evidence of a cover-up, conspiracy

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[137] Keeley, "Of conspiracy theories," 50; Fenster, *Conspiracy theories: Secrecy and power in American culture*, 94; Goodnight and Poulakos, "Conspiracy Rhetoric: From Pragmatism to Fantasy in Public Discourse."; Katherine Stewart, "Conspiracy theory's worlds," *Paranoia within reason: a casebook on conspiracy as explanation* (1999): 13-19.

theorists settle for arguing that the mainstream silence on an issue is an attempt at deception.[138]

During his keynote speech to the National Tea Party Convention, Farrah claimed to unmasked a liberal conspiracy that disqualified Obama to be President of the United States. He argued that Obama and a few of his socialist allies tricked the nation into believing that he was born in Hawaii in order to steal the presidency and destroy the American capitalist system. A central component of Farrah's grand narrative was the way it directly clashed with mainstream views regarding Obama's origin and his political agenda – even conservatives who also opposed Obama's policies:

> You know I have a dream. And my dream is that if Barack Obama even seeks reelection as president in 2012, he won't be able to go to any city, and town, any hamlet in America without seeing signs that ask, 'where's the birth certificate?' It's a simple question, and it has not been answered, despite what Bill O'Reilly will tell you. The rest of the media, they think it's ridiculous. Which makes me certain; it's one of the most important questions we can be asking … I say if its been settled, show us the birth certificate.[139]

Farrah demanded unequivocal proof that Obama was born in Hawaii, by which he meant an authentic birth certificate. Yet, even when presented with his requested documentation, Farrah simply dismissed it as insufficient to dismiss doubt about Obama's legitimacy to hold the office of President. In 2007, the Obama campaign released a certified copy of his Certificate of Live Birth. The

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[138] Fenster, *Conspiracy theories: Secrecy and power in American culture*, 94; Stewart, "Conspiracy theory's worlds," 51.
[139] Farrah, "Joseph Farrah's Address to the First National Tea Party Convention."

certificate states that Obama was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, on August 4, 1961.[140] Farrah responded that this short form was not the same as an original birth certificate.[141] A Hawaiian Department of Health spokeswoman, Janice Okubo, stated that Hawaii "does not have a short-form or long-form certificate. The director of health department has confirmed that the state "has Sen. Obama's original birth certificate on record in accordance with state policies and procedures."[142] Farrah's refusal to acknowledge these different forms of proof illustrates an important component of conspiracy theory. The conspiracy theorist is always looking for more information, and yet on another level, there is nothing more to know, because the explanation of new evidence is always already formed.[143] All new information has to fit neatly into the explanatory system the conspiracy theorist has created; if it does not, it must be discarded.

Farrah acknowledged that other, credible media outlets had researched the claim and found there was no substance to it, and yet such public statements seemed to fuel his quest for answers even more. Indeed, he argued, the fact that everyone else seemed to think this question was baseless was the reason he needed to investigate himself. Conspiracy theorists are skeptical of "credible sources." In the words of Goodnight and Poulakos:

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[140] Alex Koppelman, "Why the stories about Obama's birth certificate will never die," *Salon*, December 5, 2008, http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2008/12/05/birth_certificate.
[141] Farrah, "Joseph Farrah's Address to the First National Tea Party Convention."
[142] June Watanabe, "Born identity," *Star Bulletin*, June 6, 2009, sec. Columnists, http://www.starbulletin.com/columnists/kokualine/20090606_kokua_line.html.
[143] Fenster, *Conspiracy theories: Secrecy and power in American culture*, 95.

> Another form of rhetorical proof which becomes subject to distrust is the credibility of all sources that do not share the conspiracy hypothesis. Typically, the more highly regarded the source, the more credible the message, and the greater the likelihood of persuasion. However, since the drama of conspiracy largely unfolds in successively greater betrayals, apparent credibility ultimately serves only as a cloak of respectability, deceiving the uninitiated. It is not only that hierarchical authority loses its credibility; personal relationships, too, become suspicious. This may explain the need of the conspiratorially minded to purge even the faithful. However, while not all conspiratorial discourse finds all authority to be in complicity with the conspirators, unless the hypothesis is shared by others or vindication is attained through higher sources, the tendency to debunk credible sources increases.[144]

Farrah challenged the hierachial authority of the mainstream media by arguing the questions they were afraid to ask were the most important. For the conspiracy theorist, the very attempt to shut down the circle of interpretation is itself a suspicious act that requires interpretation.[145] Furthermore, Farrah also called out Bill O-Reilly, a staunch traditionalist that was widely respected among conservatives, for accepting the mainstream narrative. Even though O'Reilly was traditionally faithful to the cause of the movement, he had to be purged if the conspiracy theory was to remain credible.

In his keynote speech, Breitbart expanded beyond the more limited conspiracy claim related to Obama's birth certificate to maintain the existence of

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[144] Goodnight and Poulakos, "Conspiracy Rhetoric: From Pragmatism to Fantasy in Public Discourse.," 306.
[145] Fenster, *Conspiracy theories: Secrecy and power in American culture*, 94.

a liberal media conspiracy. He explained how the conspiracy between the mainstream media and America's cultural institutions functioned:

> It's a form of intimidation that they do the second that your kid walks on a college campus. They sit down in their freshman orientation, and they say, 'You're racist, your parents are racist, your patriarchal, your parents authority is over. Welcome to the American academic tradition. If you're going to graduate from here you are going to have to play by our rules.' And the mainstream media plays by those rules. And I don't think those rules are fair. So my entire business model, is born of the fundamental understanding that the media… is rigged against us. It's all I know. I know these people.[146]

Here, Breitbart situated the mainstream media within the larger conspiracy orchestrated by America's cultural institutions to promote liberal values. He personified the whole of the mainstream media, and claimed that he was familiar with their lot. Some might argue that Breitbart was not weaving a conspiracy theory in the same way that Farrah had. After all, conservatives have decried the unbalanced reporting from liberal journalists for decades.[147] But Breitbart's narrative can be distinguished from other claims that the media has a liberal bias by how viciously he attacked it. After attending the National Convention, Jonathan Kay, a conservative journalist remarked, ""One of the most bizarre moments of the recent tea-party convention came when blogger Andrew Breitbart delivered a particularly vicious fulmination against the mainstream

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[146] Breitbart, "Andrew Breitbart's Address to the First National Tea Party Convention."
[147] Eric Alterman, *What liberal media?: the truth about bias and the news* (Basic Books, 2004).

media, prompting everyone to get up, turn toward the media section at the back of the conference room, and scream, 'USA! USA! USA!'"[148] The distrust of traditionally credible sources seemed to be a consistent theme across the conspiratorial rhetoric of the Tea Party Movement.

The Evil Intent of the Conspirators

Because conspiracy theories are built on a foundation of political moralism, the motives attributed to the conspirators are nefarious.[149] This political moralism is combined with faith in the perfectability of man to create a narrative in which people who make mistakes are not just misguided; they must have evil intentions. For if it is true that there is one right and moral way to conduct oneself, and all people are capable of conducting themselves in this way, then anyone who did not must have made a conscious decision to act immorally.[150]

In the Tea Party Movement, conspiracy theorists attributed malicious motives to President Obama and his Democratic allies. According to Farrah, Obama's goal was, "to heighten the contradictions of capitalism, bring the system to it's knees and ultimately, to collapse… It's the only paradigm that makes any sense given the policies of the Obama administration and the democratic congress. They are following a deliberate course to destroy the American free-

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[148] Jonathan Kay, "Tea Party Movement Is Full of Conspiracy Theories," *Newsweek*, http://www.newsweek.com/2010/02/08/black-helicopters-over-nashville.html.
[149] Lipset and Raab, *The politics of unreason: right wing extremism in America, 1790-1970*; Keeley, "Of conspiracy theories," 51; Goodnight and Poulakos, "Conspiracy Rhetoric: From Pragmatism to Fantasy in Public Discourse.," 302.
[150] Lipset and Raab, *The politics of unreason: right wing extremism in America, 1790-1970*, 51.

enterprise system; your freedom, and the American way of life."[151] Farrah dismissed the possibility that Democrats really believed that their policies would serve the public interest. If there was only one "right" way to conduct public policy, and Democrats deviated from it, then that was all the evidence Farrah needed to confirm their nefarious motives.

Whereas Farrah focused on the President's economic policies, Tancredo was more broad in his indictment of liberals. On the first night of the National Convention, Tancredo called Obama a "committed socialist ideologue" looking for "every opportunity to destroy the Constitution before we can save it."[152] Here, Democrats did not simply disagree with Conservatives about the principles enshrined in the Constitution. For Tancredo, there was only one correct interpretation of the Constitution in any given situation and trying to impose a different interpretation was tantamount to destroying the document.

Steve Mally, a speaker on the first full day of conference proceedings at convention, focused on the international aspect of Obama's policies. He warned that Obama and his minions were conspiring to control every aspect of Americans' lives – the colors of their cars, the kind of toilet paper they used, how much time they spent in the shower, the temperature of their homes—all under the guise of U.N. greenhouse-gas-reduction schemes. He described Obama as an internationalist that envisioned one-world government.[153] It seems clear that

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[151] Farrah, "Joseph Farrah's Address to the First National Tea Party Convention."
[152] Tancredo, "Thank God John McCain Lost! Here's why.."
[153] Kay, "Tea Party Movement Is Full of Conspiracy Theories."

the rhetoric of the Tea Party Movement depicted its enemies, not simply as foolhardy or misguided, but as malicious.

The Endless Search for the Missing Link

In order to build insurmountable proof of a diabolical plot, conspiracy theorists must tie together events that seem to be unrelated. These individual pieces of information, often insignificant in themselves, are molded into an explanatory framework that "posits an affirmative effort by a clandestine force to consolidate power and subordinate others."[154] Conspiracy theorists have to link together as many individual pieces of information as possible because evidence is very hard to find in the beginning.[155] Conspiracy theories typically extend in time and space: they cross international boundaries, stretch back in history, and stretch ahead into the future.[156] They construct narratives that treat current and historical events as a series of plots to undermine the rightful order by an enemy on whom they project their own anxieties and desires.[157] While collecting the data to construct these historical narratives, conspiracy theories respect no interpretative limits. They demand continual interpretation. As Fenster put it, "There is always something more to know about the alleged conspiracy, the evidence of which is subjected to an investigative machine that depends on the perpetual motion of signification."[158] For Katherine Stewart: "Conspiracy theory is

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[154] Fenster, *Conspiracy theories: Secrecy and power in American culture*, xii.
[155] Goodnight and Poulakos, "Conspiracy Rhetoric: From Pragmatism to Fantasy in Public Discourse.," 301.
[156] Lipset and Raab, *The politics of unreason: right wing extremism in America, 1790-1970*, 17.
[157] Hofstadter, "The paranoid style in American politics."
[158] Fenster, *Conspiracy theories: Secrecy and power in American culture*, 94.

a skeptical, paranoid, obsessive practice of scanning for signs and sifting through bits of evidence for the missing link."[159]

Farrah associated America's troubles with the political thought of Antonio Gramsci. He conveniently reduced Gramsci's writings on hegemony, the role of intellectuals in society, and the state to a plan for actualizing communism in Italy. In Farrah's words, Gramsci advocated that communists, "embark on a long march, through the cultural institutions; subverting them, changing their missions, taking them over. He believed that if socialist ideas permeated the most influential non-political aspects of society: education, the philanthropies, the entertainment industries, and the press, then political power would literally fall into their laps."[160] He went on to specifically identify Obama and his allies in Congress with Gramscian political thought: "Now this work has been going on for a 100 years. This is the work that was done to lay the foundation for Obama, and Pelosi and Reid."[161] Farrah also linked Obama to the tradition of manufactured crisis through his dealings with ACORN, ACORN's connection with George Wiley, and Wiley's interaction with Cloward and Piven, two fervent Marxists.[162] Thus Obama was a part of the socialist conspiracy, just like Cloward and Piven, Lenin, Gramsci, and Marx.

In his keynote speech, Breitbart made a similar observation about the link between coverage in the mainstream media to the traditions and policies of

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[159] Stewart, "Conspiracy theory's worlds," 17.
[160] Farrah, "Joseph Farrah's Address to the First National Tea Party Convention."
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.

universities, schools, and Hollywood production companies.[163] He argued that schools and universities indoctrinated students into anti-American traditions before they entered the workforce, cultural institutions like movie and television studios perpetuated those traditions with anti-American themes in movies and television shows, and the mainstream media reported news in a way that treated these anti-American traditions as the preferences of the general public. Both Breitbart and Farrah not only simplified historical events and made caricatures of historical agents, and also connected these components into a consistent historical narrative where traditional American conservatives had lost the culture war with the left.

Summary and Conclusions

Conspiracy discourse was a consistent theme of the convention. The speakers pieced together moralistic, and historically simplistic grand narratives that cast President Obama and his liberal allies, as well as the mainstream media, as nefarious conspirators planning to destroy the American way of life. In the process, they tried to discredit the mainstream media and make the movement, and sources that they deemed to be legitimate, the only sources of information the people could trust. The Tea Party speakers used conspiracy discourse in a way that was consistent with the literature about the use of conspiracy theory in radical social movements. The speakers employed conspiracy discourse in order to ultimately and indefinitely discredit their political opponents, and to build solidarity among the audience members. The speakers

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[163] Breitbart, “Andrew Breitbart's Address to the First National Tea Party Convention.”

set up the audience to take up the roll of detectives searching for a missing link that may never find.

Chapters three and four focused on the discourse of the speakers at the convention and other potential leaders of the Tea Party Movement. These chapters analyzed the speeches delivered for elements of public communication strategies used in radical conservative movements. But both chapters excluded the final speaker at the convention because her discourse bore few similarities to that espoused by the other speakers. Chapter five will analyze her speech to identify the similarities and differences between her speech and the other speeches featured throughout the previous chapters. I will draw on literature about the rhetoric of national nominating conventions and the priestly voice in order to explain these similarities and differences.

Chapter 5: Sarah Palin as the High Priest of the Movement

On the evening of February 6, 2010, Sarah Palin delivered the closing speech of the first-ever National Tea Party Convention. While promoting the event, the convention's organizers touted Palin's speech as the highlight of the convention. Given the character of the proceedings up to that point, one might have expected Palin's speech to focus on a radical theme. And yet, Palin's speech was devoid of the prophetic and conspiratorial discourse that characterized the other keynote addresses.

The prophetic voice is built on a foundation of political moralism and monism. An unwavering conviction in the speaker's moral superiority is what unites the various aspects of the prophetic tradition. The prophet functions as the mouth-piece of God. The divine word is sacred and cannot be compromised for political expediency. The people must come to God; He never comes to them. Yet Palin told her audience that compromise was not just inevitable, but, instead, what the movement was really about:

> […] it is what we believe in and that's what this movement is all about. When people are willing to meet halfway and stand up for common sense solutions and values, then we want to work with them. And in that spirit, I applaud Independents and Democrats like Bart Stupak who stood up to tough partisan pressure and he wanted to protect the sanctity of life and the rights of the soon to be born. I applaud him for that. When we can work together, we will.

True prophets never work with people who are willing to meet them halfway. None of the other convention speakers applauded the efforts of a single liberal politician. Any time a liberal politician was mentioned they were described as a

part of the problem, not the solution. Not once did any of the other convention speakers tout the benefits of working across political divisions. Instead, they explicitly denounced the idea that compromise would solve America's problems. Palin took several opportunities to applaud Democrats, including Obama, that were inconsistent with the spirit of the movement, in order to build common ground with the opposition. Palin did not claim that the primary goal of the movement was to win a war, as many of the other speakers had done.

Conspiracy theories also rely on political moralism to function. A key component of conspiracy discourse is a belief in the perfectability of man. If people are capable of finding "truth" and behaving accordingly, then the only way to understand someone who strays from "truth" is to believe that they intentionally chose to neglect their duties. Here again, Palin broke with the convention:

> But while I hope you give the candidates that you choose your best effort, please understand they're human. There's no perfect candidate. And they're going to disappoint occasionally. And when they do, let them know, but don't get discouraged and sit it out, because the stakes are too high. The stakes are too high right now, and your voice is too important, so work hard for these candidates but put your faith in ideas.[164]

She emphasized her reformist tone by asking Tea Party protestors to remain engaged in the political process even if the politicians they elected made mistakes. By explicitly stating that all humans are fallible and imperfect, Palin

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[164] Sarah Palin, "Sarah Palin Speaks at Tea Party Convention" (Speech presented at the National Tea Party Conventions, Opryland Hotel, Nashville, TN, February 6, 2010), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7gVp3diPbI.

undermined the case for political moralism. Not once, did Palin characterize the opposition as nefarious. When she discussed Democratic miscues, as she did with Obama's foreign policy decisions and congressional health care plans, she referred to them as "misguided thinking."

So why did Palin's speech significantly differ from those of the other keynote speakers? It is important to note that certain elements of her speech were indeed consistent with those of the other speakers; she promoted many of the same conservative values and principles as they did. She, like the other keynote speakers, advocated limited government, fiscal restraint, and common-sense solutions. But in very important ways her keynote speech drastically differed from the rhetoric espoused by the other speakers. Palin did not employ conspiracy rhetoric and she was not a prophet of the movement. In order to explain why Palin's speech differed from those of the other speakers, we have to examine Palin's unique rhetorical situation.

The Convention Metaphor

On February 4-6, 2010, a for-profit corporation named Tea Party Nation hosted the National Tea Party Convention. The convention was the culmination of a collaborative effort by Judson Phillips, the head of Tea Party Nation, and Mark Skoda, the leader of the Memphis Tea Party. The convention was billed as an event "where local tea party groups could select their best to meet with their peers from across the nation."[165] The decision to host a national level event associated with the Tea Party Movement was significant in itself. Tea Party

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[165] "The Tea Party Convention in Opryland, Nashville, Tennessee » Right Pundits," http://www.rightpundits.com/?p=5286.

protestors had traditionally gathered at small, local rallies to voice their displeasure with out-of-control spending, mainstream media, immigration policies, etc. The local nature of the protests contributed to the perception that the Tea Party protests were an expression of genuine, popular discontent. The execution of a national level event risked destroying this perception.[166]

A significant aspect of Phillips' and Skoda's decision to host the event was the decision to name it the National Tea Party Convention. The name invites comparison to the nominating conventions of America's two major political parties. At first glance, it would appear that the National Tea Party Convention does not resemble the nominating conventions of the Democratic and Republican Parties. Parties use nominating conventions as venues to officially designate their presidential candidates. In early eras, delegates selected the nominees during the convention proceedings, but shortly after conventions became nationally televised in the 1950s, both parties decided to front-load the decision by placing greater emphasis on the primary elections.[167] However, while the official change in nominating procedure happened during the 1950's, even before then, nominating decisions were never truly made during conventions. "Conventions have always tended to be decision *ratifiers* -- that is, they put the party label on decisions made elsewhere: compromises and deals struck in state

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[166] "Riehl World View: Judson Phillips Wants To Be A Tea Party Millionaire?," http://www.riehlworldview.com/carnivorous_conservative/2010/01/judson-phillips-wants-to-be-a-tea-party-millionaire.html.
[167] W. L. Benoit, J. R. Blaney, and P. M. Pier, *Campaign'96: A functional analysis of acclaiming, attacking, and defending* (Praeger Publishers, 1998), 108.

legislatures in an earlier era, then in state conventions run by party machines, in smoke-filled rooms, but rarely open on the floor of a national convention."[168]

Judged by either standard, that is, *making* decisions or *ratifying* them, the Tea Party National Convention did not perform the primary task of nominating conventions. The Tea Party Movement is not a political party, and thus, it cannot nominate a candidate to run for President of the United States. The convention occurred two years before the national elections, rather than several months before the November elections, as is the common practice of national nominating conventions. Even if the movement were capable of nominating a presidential candidate, it would be too early in the election cycle to do so.

And yet, in some ways, the convention metaphor was apt. The Tea Party Movement may not have been able to nominate a presidential candidate, but the movement was in search of leadership. The Tea Party Movement is unlike most social movements in that is has no clear founding members or leaders. Previous studies have documented the importance of founders to a movement's progression.[169] Gerardo Munck explained, "Founders are, quite literally, the social actors who both organize a decentralized mass and orient it toward change and who, in such a role, constitute the core of a social movement."[170]

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[168] Larry, David Smith and Dan Nimmo, *Cordial concurrence: Orchestrating national party conventions in the telepolitical age* (Praeger Publishers, 1991), 4.
[169] Alaine Touraine, *77ie Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 299, 329; S. Tarrow and Tollefson, *Power in movement: Social movements, collective action and politics* (Cambridge University Press New York, 1994), 23.
[170] Gerardo Munck, "Actor formation, social co-ordination, and political strategy: Some conceptual problems in the study of social movements," *Sociology* 29, no. 4 (1995): 672.

Movement founders carry a vision of a new world order that forms the basis for collective action. As I have established in earlier chapters, the closest thing the Tea Party Movement has to a founding moment are Rick Santelli's public statements about a Chicago Tea Party on CNBC. Prominent political and media figures have tried to shape the movement in various ways, but it has been difficult for anyone to claim ownership of the movement. Sal Russo, the architect of Tea Party Express and one of the most visible factions of the movement, stated in the fall of 2009, "It's opened for a leader. I don't see anyone out there that can grab it."[171]

Some have argued the lack of national-level leadership has been an advantage for the Tea Party Movement. Indeed, individual initiative is touted as one of the most important values the movement represents.[172] Others have argued that the lack of a leader makes it more difficult for the movement to focus it resources and mobilize its members.[173] At worst, the leadership vacuum could result in what some have called a conservative civil war, resulting in bloody primaries that will leave the Republicans limping into the upcoming elections with fringe candidates.[174] Anyone interested in harnessing the power of the movement

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[171] Jim Spellman, "Tea party movement has anger, no dominant leaders," *CNN*, September 12, 2009, sec. Politics, http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/09/12/tea.party.express/index.html.
[172] See, for example, Lloyd Marcus, "The Tea Party Movement Does Not Need a Leader!," *American Thinker*, January 4, 2010, http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/01/the_tea_party_movement_does_no_1.html.
[173] Vogel, "A March, But is it a Movement?."
[174] Kenneth Vogle, "Conservatives grab for tea party cash," *Politico.com*, December 15, 2009, sec. Politics, http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1209/30595_Page2.html.

to achieve success at the polls would want to guard against conservative infighting, even if they were not interested in the ascension of a particular movement leader. In this context, the organizers' decision to evoke the convention metaphor can be as seen as part of an effort to give the movement leadership and direction.

Palin delivered a keynote address to the convention audience on February 6, 2010. I say that she delivered "a" keynote address, instead of "the" keynote address, because the convention organizers officially designated several keynote speakers. This does not conform to the expectations set by traditional nominating conventions. Conventions typically designate one keynote speaker. Rhetorical scholars have indicated that a keynote speech has to perform particular tasks. These tasks include celebrating the party's candidate, values, and policies, appealing for unity after a potentially divisive primary season, and attacking the opposing party and nominee.[175] Having more than one keynote speech prevents the speech from fulfilling its most important prupose: that is, setting the tone (or note) for the rest of the convention. [176] This is especially true in instances where different speeches contradict each other dramatically in terms of content or style.

Looking beyond her formal title at the convention, it should be clear that Palin did not, in fact, deliver a keynote address. Palin's speech would best be understood as the final speaker's address, commonly referred to at nominating conventions as an "acceptance speech." In a typical nomination convention, the

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[175] Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, *Campaign'96: A functional analysis of acclaiming, attacking, and defending*.
[176] Ibid., 118.

presidential nomination acceptance address is intended to be the highpoint of the convention. It is traditionally scheduled at the end of the final day of the convention to serve as "the climax of the gathering of party faithful."[177] While the possibility remains that other discourses that occur at conventions, like keynote speeches, or speeches by candidates' spouses, may elicit a more favorable response from the audience (either in the convention, or watching on television) or more attention from the media, "there can be no doubt that conventions are designed so that nominees' speeches are the highlight of these celebrations."[178]

Palin's speech was scheduled for the night of the February 6, 2010; the last official proceeding on the last night of the convention. The convention's organizers agreed to allow television networks including Fox News, CNN, and Reuters TV to broadcast her speech (along with a few other events) nationally.[179] Her position as a prominent political figure ensured that her address would receive more media coverage than any of the other speakers at the convention. Palin was the governor of Alaska from 2006 until she resigned in 2009. She ran on a presidential ticket with John McCain as a vice-presidential candidate during the 2008 presidential election. She was the first female vice-presidential nominee of the Republican Party. After her resignation in 2009, many speculated that she might run for the Republican Party presidential nomination in 2012. In the eyes of

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[177] Ibid.
[178] William Benoit, Blaney Blaney, and P. M. Pier, "Acclaiming, attacking, and defending: A functional analysis of US nominating convention keynote speeches," *Political Communication* 17, no. 1 (2000): 61-84.
[179] Kate Zernike, "Tea Party Convention's Keynote and Other Events Will Be Televised," *New York Times*, February 1, 2010, sec. Politics, http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/02/01/tea-party-conventions-keynote-and-other-events-will-be-televised/.

many Americans, she was still a prominent, if not the most prominent member of the Republican Party, a party struggling to redefine its image after major electoral defeats.[180] And even though she was not officially affiliated with the movement, many had crowned Palin as "the movement's most visible and popular hero."[181]

By any standard, Palin's speech received the most attention at the convention and thus, may be best understood as a version of an acceptance address, rather than a traditional keynote address. Examining her speech through the lens of acceptance addresses should yield some insight into some of the rhetorical decisions Palin made in her speech. Perhaps Palin did not employ conspiracy discourse or adopt the prophetic voice because neither of these moves would have been consistent with the rhetorical expectations of presidential acceptance speeches. Scholars have indicated that the context of the nominating convention demands that a speech be delivered which performs important and necessary functions, regardless of what the speech is officially called. [182] In traditional conventions, these functions include; (1) public acceptance of the party's nomination by the candidate, (2) eliciting concerted and vocal response from the delegates, and (3) representing to the wider viewing audience (those watching the convention on television) an act of political

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[180] Steve Pendlebury, "Sarah Palin Will Speak at First National Tea Party Convention," *Aolnews.com*, January 7, 2010, http://www.aolnews.com/nation/article/sarah-palin-will-speak-at-first-national-tea-party-convention/19307596.
[181] Good, "Palin To Address Tea Party Convention."
[182] Robert O. Nordvold, "Rhetoric as Ritual: Hubert H. Humphrey's Acceptance Address at the 1968 Democratic national Convention.," *Today's Speech* 18, no. 1 (Winter1970 1970): 34.

solidarity and a call for unity.[183] The acceptance address is an exercise in both epidictic and deliberative rhetoric. Presidential candidates must distinguish themselves from their opponents by referencing policy differences, or personal credibility issues. At the same time, these deliberative details must not be made to overshadow the ceremonial aspect of the speech. The speech is a part of a "political ritual" that must enact a call for unity. There is typically a relatively minor focus on divisive policy issues in favor of highly figurative language that celebrates common and enduring values.

The use of the prophetic voice and conspiracy discourse is not consistent with many of the expectations of an acceptance speech. By virtue of their charismatic appeal, prophets can announce themselves as leaders. But they cannot join in the celebration of a convention. The ethos of a prophet rests upon his personal failure.[184] They can rehearse the values of a society because their purpose is to reiterate the principles of the covenant to the people. But prophets cannot call for unity between the faithful and the unconverted. The people must embrace the covenant unconditionally; the word of God cannot be compromised. Integrating the movement into the Republican Party was not something that prophets could do because of their unwavering moral conviction. Likewise, convention speeches are inopportune moments to employ conspiracy discourse

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[183] Smith and Nimmo, *Cordial concurrence: Orchestrating national party conventions in the telepolitical age*, 81; Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, *Campaign'96: A functional analysis of acclaiming, attacking, and defending*, 108; Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, "Acclaiming, attacking, and defending: A functional analysis of US nominating convention keynote speeches"; Nordvold, "Rhetoric as Ritual: Hubert H. Humphrey's Acceptance Address at the 1968 Democratic national Convention.," 35.

[184] Darsey, *The prophetic tradition and radical rhetoric in America*, 32.

because conspiracy theories suggests that anyone who is not faithful to the cause is part of a nefarious plot to manipulate the people. The notion that people who disagree with you are evil is not conducive to unifying large groups of people with different values and ideas about policy. Thus, Palin had to adopt a different voice than those used by the other convention speakers.

Sarah Palin and he Priestly Voice

If Palin is not a prophet of the Tea Party Movement, then perhaps she is the movement's high priest. Several studies have contrasted the rhetoric of priests with the rhetoric of prophets. According to Madsen and Chandler, priests have three separate and distinct characteristics: they perform ceremonial rites on behalf of the people to God, they serve as mediators between God and His people, or between people and the sacred texts, and finally, priests tend to uphold the existing institutional structures.[185]

Priests perform sacred ceremonies on behalf of the people to God. When the people sin, they ask priests to perform ceremonial sacrifices or prayers in their name. In contrast, the prophet does not perform ceremonial rites on behalf of the people (unless they are also working as priests). They are not empowered to do so as part of a religious institution. Related to this ceremonial function is the tendency of priests to serve as judges. Priests deal with violations of God's law as well as secular matters. They act as the court of appeal in the more difficult

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[185] Madsen and Chandler, "Prophets and Priests: Argument By and Before the Supreme Court.," 367.

controversies or civil cases. Prophets, on the other hand, do not have the ability to deliver judgment.[186]

The second function of priests is to serve as mediators between God and his people. Priests are charged with interpreting sacred texts and telling the people the "truth" about God's will. Prophets perform a similar function, but they claim to directly proclaim the word of God. It would seem that priests would have the upper hand in confrontations with prophets, but more often priests are able to label prophets as false prophets, and discredit their message in the eyes of the people.[187] Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that priests function as gatekeepers for the frontier of the professional world. They are rhetorical police who welcome the politically faithful while blocking unbelievers.[188]

When priestly discourse is used by secular figures,[189] priests act as mediators between an elite subculture and broader social groups.[190] Priests are both a part of and detached from the society they serve, positioned "at the outskirts of their world as ambassadors to the unsaved."[191] They are charged with blending theory with practice. A portion of their function is to adapt the message of the culture they represent so that it is easier to understand and relate to for their broader audience. Prophets do not perform this function. The divine

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[186] Ibid., 366.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Thomas M. Lessl, "The Priestly Voice.," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75, no. 2 (May 1989): 186-187.
[189] Burke, *Permanence and change: An anatomy of purpose*, 276.
[190] Lessl, "The Priestly Voice.," 184.
[191] Ibid.

word cannot be compromised for any reason, even if it results in more converts. Doing so would damage the sacred trust imparted to the prophet by the Creator.

Finally, priests are distinguished from prophets by their defense of the established institutional order. Burke argued, "[…] the priests devote their efforts to maintaining the vestigial structure; prophets seek new perspectives whereby this vestigial structure may be criticized and a new one established in its place."[192] Prophets criticize the people for abandoning the covenant. They also appear in times of extreme distress, where "traditional ways of seeing and doing have lost their authority."[193] In such turbulent times, dispensing with the old order in favor of a new, more faithful social structure is absolutely essential. By contrast, the authority of priests is maintained insofar as their interpretation of sacred text is deemed rational. Because these interpretations are open to criticism, priests tend to respect the precedents of the existing order.

Palin's rhetoric is much more consistent with the expectations of the priestly voice than those of the prophetic voice, because the former allowed her to remain more consistent with the conventions of an acceptance speech. Acceptance speeches create expectation in the audience for the speaker to accept a leadership position, to engage in a political ritual that celebrates and rehearses the values of the party, and to call for unity. Palin performed each of these functions using the priestly voice in an effort to accomplish her aims.

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[192] Burke, *Permanence and change: An anatomy of purpose*, 179.
[193] Ibid., 223.

Accepting the Nomination

The first of these audience expectations, accepting her role as the leader of the movement, placed Palin in a difficult position. The primary function of the nominating convention is to celebrate the selection of the party's candidate. As the centerpiece of the convention, the final speaker has to accept his title as the party leader or the celebration cannot continue. In the case of presidential candidates, this acceptance is just a formality (albeit a symbolically important one) – he is the party's candidate whether he gives an acceptance speech or not. But this dynamic is more complicated in Palin's case. The organizers employed the convention metaphor in order to *imply* that Palin was the movement's leader. No delegates selected her as the head of the movement. Her speech would have to assert through embodiment, rather than accept, her claim to lead.

At the same time, Palin had to combat charges that she was going to corrupt the populist spirit of the movement by claiming it as her own. It would be difficult for her to simultaneously assert her right to lead the movement while articulating the spirit of the movement in terms that resonated with the convention participants. She deflected controversy by removing the leadership status from any single man or woman at this point in the movement's development when she said:

> And in that spirit, I caution against allowing this movement to be defined by any one leader or politician. The tea party movement is not a top-down operation. It's a ground-up call to action that is forcing both parties to change the way they're doing business, and that's beautiful. This is about the people. This is about the people. And it's bigger than any king or queen of a tea party. And it's a lot bigger than any charismatic guy with a

> teleprompter. The soul of this movement is the people, everyday Americans, who grow our food and run our small businesses, who 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. Like you, they go to town hall meetings and they write op-eds. They run for local office. You all have the courage to stand up and speak out. You have a vision for the future, one that values conservative principles and commonsense solutions.[194]

Palin's response to this commitment was to explicitly reject the idea that she was the "queen" of the movement. Instead of embracing the title implied by her role at the convention, she chose to emphasize the populist nature of the protests. She praised the value of individual initiative, and mocked the suggestion that a charismatic leader with a grand vision knew better than ordinary folk using commonsense.

And yet, Palin's move to applaud ordinary folk set Palin herself up to become a leader in the movement. For years, Palin had cultivated her image as the spokeswoman for ordinary people in America. During the 2008 presidential campaign, she was criticized at times for her clumsy use of the English language.[195] She was also mocked in the media for lacking pertinent political information. Her speaking style during debates was often described as folksy and

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[194] Palin, "Sarah Palin Speaks at Tea Party Convention."
[195] Patrick Roberts, "Tea Party Mascot Sarah Palin Laughing All the Way to the Bank," *Irish Central*, April 15, 2010, http://www.irishcentral.com/story/news/people_and_politics/sarah-palin-laughing-all-the-way-to-the-bank-90962519.html.

charming.[196] Though she was a governor during the campaign, she resigned from that post shortly after the campaign ended. She claimed that she did not want to contribute to politics as usual as a lame duck executive and she would find a better way to contribute to the change her state needed.[197] If the Tea Party Movement was the home of the ordinary American, then Sarah Palin was a natural leader for the movement.

Furthermore, by agreeing to give the final keynote address at the convention, Palin was hinting at her acceptance of her place as the leader of the movement. This is especially true considering the fact that she twice passed up opportunities to speak at the Conservative Political Action Conference, an annual political conference attended by conservative activists and elected officials from across the United States.[198] Her speech at the convention was the first she had delivered in several months.

Palin also established herself as the leader of the movement using the priestly voice. Palin agreed to participate in a short question and answer session with Phillips in front of the crowd (another distinction between Palin and the other keynote speakers who were not afforded the same opportunity). In the final

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[196] Arthur Brice, "Palin Brings Her Folksy Tone to Debate," *Cnn.com*, http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/02/palin.debate/index.html.
[197] Chris Cillizza, "Palin To Resign, Focus on Presidential Run," *The Washington Post*, June 9, 2009, http://voices.washingtonpost.com/thefix/governors/palin-will-not-run-for-reelect.html.
[198] David Weigel, "WorldNetDaily and Palin, Together At Last," *The Washington Independent* (online, January 7, 2010), sec. politics, http://washingtonindependent.com/73389/worldnetdaily-and-palin-together-at-last.

exchange, Phillips asked Palin if she would be endorsing specific candidates during the upcoming primaries. She responded:

> I will. And I will be attending as many events for these candidates as possible. I'll probably tick off some people as I get involved, even in a few of the primaries, but I do want to encourage these contested competitive primaries. Truly, this is how we are going to find the cream of the crop to rise to be able to face a challenger in the general. Let's not be afraid of contested primaries. I'm going to assist in some of those, but I'll get out there and campaign and if not in all the races, campaigning for specific candidates, I'm going to be campaigning for the message, this common sense conservative message.[199]

Less than half an hour after arguing that the movement should "not be defined by any one leader or politician," she explained that she would "be campaigning for the message." Palin announced that she would be the one to decide which political candidates were faithful to the cause of the movement. In this way, she set herself up as a gatekeeper, one who welcomes the faithful and blocks unbelievers.[200] Priests also act as judges who decide the outcome of important disputes.[201] Deciding which candidate should be endorsed in a primary election is akin to judging a dispute over which candidate was more faithful to the movement. Even though she encouraged the audience to, "[…] get out there and

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[199] Palin, "Sarah Palin Speaks at Tea Party Convention."
[200] Lessl, "The Priestly Voice.," 185.
[201] Madsen and Chandler, "Prophets and Priests: Argument By and Before the Supreme Court.," 366.

work hard for the candidates who reflect your values, your priorities […],"[202] it was actually Palin that defined the values and priorities of those in the audience.

A cluster analysis of the word "you" in Palin's speech revealed a concerted effort to define the values of Tea Party protestors. Palin used the word "you" in reference to the audience over thirty times in her speech. In over twenty of those instances she was defining the values of the audience, describing who they were or where they came from, or prescribing courses of action. For instance, Palin told the audience about their vision of the movement: "You have a vision for the future, one that values conservative principles and commonsense solutions. And if that sounds like you, then you probably, too, are feeling a bit discouraged by what you see in Washington, D.C." Throughout her speech, she told her audience what they valued most: "We need a strong national defense. I think you would agree with me […] I'm just like you, probably so tired of hearing the talk, talk, talk. It's time for some tough actions [against Iran]."[203] By couching her attempts to define the spirit of the movement in terms of the people's own values and priorities, Palin was able to reserve a leadership role for herself without explicitly accepting the position. Movement leaders often select the platform a of movement and make decisions about the direction the movement should take.[204] Unlike presidential candidates, who must openly acknowledge their place as the leader of the party, the only way that Palin could accept, or rather, assert, her

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[202] Palin, "Sarah Palin Speaks at Tea Party Convention."
[203] Ibid.
[204] Stewart, "A functional approach to the rhetoric of social movements," 300.

position in the movement was to explicitly reject the title and instead lead by embodying the actions of a leader.

The Political Ritual

"The convention is a 'party' event in more than one sense of the word. It is meant as a meeting of the political party, the time to formally nominate its candidates for president and vice president. However, it is also a chance for delegates to celebrate their principles, and their inevitable march to victory in November."[205] Defining the convention as a celebration implies that the audience will participate in the proceedings. Indeed, one of an acceptance speech's primary functions is to produce a physical and vocal reaction from the crowd.

Palin met these expectations in traditional ways. Current literature suggests that one way of eliciting emotional, vocal responses from the crowd is by employing a pattern of alternation between statement and response from the audience.[206] Palin used this technique very effectively. She spoke for just over forty minutes and yet there were forty-two breaks in her speech for sustained applause and or laughter.[207] In several of these exchanges, Palin used a slow build-up, accompanied by a sharp change in tone, to elicit a more intense vocal response from the audience. For instance, when criticizing the administration for the way it handled the interrogation of a terrorist suspect, she started off in an indignant, yet somewhat muted tone, but built up steam as she finished her

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[205] Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, *Campaign'96: A functional analysis of acclaiming, attacking, and defending*, 118.
[206] Nordvold, "Rhetoric as Ritual: Hubert H. Humphrey's Acceptance Address at the 1968 Democratic national Convention.," 36.
[207] "In Full: Palin's Tea Party Speech," *CBSNEWS.com*, February 6, 2010, http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=6182081n.

statement. “The administration says that there are no downsides or upsides to treating terrorists like civilian criminal defendants. But a lot of us would beg to differ. For example, there are questions we would have liked this foreign terrorist to answer before he lawyered up and invoked our U.S. constitutional right to remain silent.” Afterward, she stopped to wait for applause, but unlike previous instances, where she waited for the applause to conclude before continuing her speech, she interrupted the crowd, building on their response. “Our U.S. constitutional rights! Our rights that you, sir, fought and were willing to die for to protect in our Constitution!” The man she was referencing was a veteran who was applauding with some vigor. She used a sudden burst of emotion to elicit an intense response from the crowd, then singled out audience members who were exceptional at answering her call.[208]

Calling for Solidarity

The call for unity and solidarity is an important expectation in acceptance speeches. The acceptance speech is, “an opportunity to celebrate unity if the party is unified and appeal for unity if it is divided.”[209] This has always been an expectation of acceptance speeches, but it gained special importance once conventions began to be nationally televised. Not only did the candidate have to address the delegates participating in the convention, he had to address an audience of Americans generally.[210] Whereas the primary purpose of the keynote

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[208] Ibid.Ibid.
[209] Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, *Campaign'96: A functional analysis of acclaiming, attacking, and defending*, 107.
[210] Nordvold, “Rhetoric as Ritual: Hubert H. Humphrey's Acceptance Address at the 1968 Democratic national Convention.,” 35.

speech is to create sharp divisions between one's own party and the opposition by employing a fairly even distribution of acclaims for "our" successes and attacks pointing out "their" failures, acceptance speeches rely much more heavily on acclaims than attacks.[211] The celebratory tone is much more conducive to calls for national unity than a series of attacks against the opposition. This is not to suggest that presidential candidates delivering acceptance speeches do not criticize the opposition. Studies have shown that they do indeed criticize both the party, and the nominee (or presumptive nominee). Rather the proportion of acclamation is greater than the proportion of attacks.

Palin faced a different situational exigency than do conventional presidential candidates. In the American political system, a candidate is unlikely to win the presidency unless they carry a substantial number of independent voters. Thus, the presidential candidate speaking to a national television audience at the convention must tone down the partisan rhetoric in order to persuade moderates and independent voters to give him their support. Palin was also speaking to a national audience, but the division she addressed was not a general division among Americans; it was an internal division among conservatives. Palin specifically addressed the issue of conservative unity when she discussed the upcoming primary season:

> This year, there are going to be tough primaries. And I think that's good. Competition in these primaries is good. Competition makes us work

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[211] Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, "Acclaiming, attacking, and defending: A functional analysis of US nominating convention keynote speeches"; Benoit, Blaney, and Pier, *Campaign'96: A functional analysis of acclaiming, attacking, and defending*, 108.

> harder and be more efficient and produce more. I hope you will get out there and work hard for the candidates who reflect your values, your priorities, because despite what the pundits want you to think, contested primaries aren't civil war. They're democracy at work and that's beautiful.[212]

An important characteristic of both keynote speeches and acceptance speeches is that both signify the end of a bitter primary season, unless the party's representative is the incumbent. Because the convention was held in early February, two years away from the general election, it makes sense that there are relatively few references to the primaries in the other keynote speeches. Indeed, Palin's speech marked the first time that any of the major speakers at the convention even mentioned the primary process. Any remarks about elections made previously were vague references to past or future gains at the polls. What is interesting about this remark, however, is that is seems to encourage divisiveness during the primary season. By arguing that competition does not equate with "civil war," Palin seemed to give the green-light to candidates and supporters to argue about who best represented the spirit of the movement. Seen in this context, Palin seemed to be intentionally ignoring one of the foundational obligations of an acceptance speech, namely, the call for unity.

In addition, she spent a larger portion of her speech attacking liberals than she did acclaiming the success or spirit of the movement. Nearly three-fourths of her speech was spent leveling attacks on Washington politicos, the Obama administration, Obama personally, and Congressional Democrats. She spend a

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[212] Palin, "Sarah Palin Speaks at Tea Party Convention."

tenth of the speech praising the spirit of the movement and the limited electoral successes it has had. She spent another tenth praising prominent Republicans, like John McCain, as well as independents and “blue-dog” Democrats who seemed to be sympathetic to conservative causes. While one might characterize these attacks as loss-risk attempts to unify her conservative audience, this is not necessarily the case. Over a fourth of her speech concentrated on foreign policy issues. For example, she chided the president for cutting support for democracy promotion programs and failing to stand up to, what she viewed as, hostile leaders of rogue nations:

> And around the world, people who are seeking freedom from oppressive regimes wonder if Alaska is still that beacon of hope for their cause. The administration cut support for democracy programs. And where the president has not been clear, I ask where is his clear and where his strong voice of support for the Iranians who are risking all in their opposition to Ahmadinejad?[213]

Palin exposed as many contrasts as possible between the Republican and Democratic parties and positioned Democrats to serve as the recipients of the grassroots’ anger in the Tea Party Movement. But none of the other speakers mentioned foreign policy in any detail. It is arguable that the Tea Party Movement does not have any broader foreign policy goals outside of reducing American military spending or foreign aid. In fact, a prominent wing of the movement, strongly associated with Republican Congressman, Ron Paul, is strongly opposed to spending American tax dollars on foreign interventions, especially the

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[213] Ibid.

type promoting American values in other countries.[214] To be sure, Palin did not take the path of least resistance in terms of representing a call for unity. She encouraged conservatives to debate their differences in a constructive manner, even though these debates risked splintering the movement. She applauded the efforts of certain conservatives, even though a large portion of the audience might not see those efforts favorably.

And yet, when viewed in the larger context of the radical rhetoric of many Tea Party activists, Palin's discourse might be seen as an attempt to situate the Tea Party Movement within the mainstream Republican Party. By predicting that the primaries would be "tough," she acknowledged the differences that may exist between Tea Party protestors and traditional Republicans. But even the suggestion that tea party activists should participate in Republican primaries might have been read as a call for unity. Given some of the discourse that appeared in the other keynote speeches, the idea that Tea Party protestors and candidates would consider themselves Republicans, and compete in those contests was not a foregone conclusion. By arguing that the primaries were not "civil war," she encouraged contested primaries, but did not intend for them to divide conservatives into competing factions in the long term. Many Tea Party protestors hail from the south, and the southwest,[215] and the civil war metaphor may have carried significant weight for them. Palin intended to alleviate worries

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[214] Vogel, "A March, But is it a Movement?."
[215] Dante Chinni, "Tea Party: How Big Is It, and Where Is It Based?," *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 21, 2010, http://patchworknation.csmonitor.com/csmstaff/2010/0421/tea-party-how-big-is-it-and-where-is-it-based/.

that the movement would become a threat to the Republican Party by identifying movement activists with the Republican primaries. Furthermore, she asked Tea Party protestors to remain engaged in the political process even if the (presumably Republican) politicians they backed made mistakes.[216]

Palin's unity appeals were consistent with the priestly voice. Her calls for the movement to integrate itself into the Republican mainstream and her identification of the movement in a long tradition of conservatism dating back to the time of George Washington were both examples of defending the old order. According to Madsen and Chandler, "[…] priests tend to uphold the present order, whereas prophets argue for a new order, an order based on justice and equality."[217] The prophets of the movement denounced Republicans and Democrats alike. Anyone who violated the covenant was an enemy, no matter what their political affiliation. In contrast, Palin was a representative from an elite culture (the Republican mainstream) trying to appeal to a broader group (the people as such), just as priests cross the boundaries between a particular elite subculture and broader social groups.[218] Priests are a part of, and separate from, the community they address. Because she was recently retired as the governor of Alaska, she could characterize herself as an ordinary individual just like the rest of the protestors, and yet her affiliation with the Republican Party would continue to separate her from many members of the movement who held no particular political allegiances, just strong convictions.

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[216] Palin, "Sarah Palin Speaks at Tea Party Convention."
[217] Madsen and Chandler, "Prophets and Priests: Argument By and Before the Supreme Court.," 36.
[218] Lessl, "The Priestly Voice.," 185.

It would appear that Palin's keynote address, with some exceptions, met the expectations of an acceptance speech. She called for unity between Tea Party protestors and the Republican Party. She performed a political ritual in which members of the audience could celebrate their "candidate" and rehearse the values. Her tone of her speech was more hostile and attacking than traditional acceptance speeches, but this is because she was accepting leadership of a movement without many successes or official platforms to applaud. She was not able to directly accept a leadership role because the Tea Party Movement's lack of a leader is an explicit part of the movement's dogma. However, using the priestly voice, she implicitly played the role of a leader by performing some of the functions that leaders perform.

Summary and Conclusions

The National Tea Party Convention was organized in a way that set up Sarah Palin to take a leadership role in the movement. Palin gave a speech that may be properly understood as an acceptance address for the leader of the movement. She chose to use different discourse than the other convention speakers because the adoption of the prophetic voice or the use of conspiracy theories was not consistent with the function of an acceptance speech. She used the priestly voice in order to fulfill some of the rhetorical expectations of an acceptance address that her situational exigency would not allow. While she explicitly stated that the movement not be ruled by any one politician, she reserved the power to define the issues of the movement and to anoint particular candidates herself. These efforts to establish herself as the high priest of the Tea

Party Movement could be interpreted as a strategy to gain political power. Palin failed in her quest to become vice-president; perhaps a different approach was necessary.

Comparing the National Tea Party Convention to a nominating convention allows us to explain why Palin's rhetoric was significantly different from that of the other speakers. As the final speaker, Palin faced a different rhetorical situation than the other speakers. Her speech had to function as an acceptance speech for the leader of the movement. Palin was able to meet the expectations of an acceptance speech using the priestly voice. Whereas a prophet would have been incapable of accepting a leadership role or calling for unity, the priest was more than capable. But why was Palin's speech made into the centerpiece of the proceedings? Why invoke the convention metaphor to begin with, if it would only result in Palin overshadowing the rest of the convention speakers? Perhaps, the convention organizers wanted to hear this particular message.

In December of 2009, Phillips, the president of Tea Party Nation, and the principle organizer behind the National Convention, explained what he believed the Tea Party Movement needed to do to achieve its goal: "If the Tea Party movement is only about doing protests, going out having our rallies, then the movement has failed... The only way the Tea Party movement is going to be successful in 2010 is if we are able to get out there and elect good officeholders to replace the bad ones we have in there."[219] Phillips defined the success of the movement exclusively by its ability to achieve favorable results at the polls. This

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[219] Vogle, "Conservatives grab for tea party cash."

runs counter to sentiments expressed by Farrah and Breitbart at the convention. Both argued that the broader goal of the movement was to win a culture war with the left. The speakers tried to broaden the scope of the movement in order to distinguish it from traditional reformism. In other words, these speakers thought the movement's goal was to transform the whole of American society from the top, meaning the political institutions, to the bottom, referring to cultural institutions. Judson's vision was much more consistent with the deliberative rhetoric characteristic of procedural protest movements.

On the final day of the convention, Phillips announced that Tea Party Nation would be forming a political action committee name Enduring Liberty to "address the next step in the growing impact of the citizen activist movement."[220] When asked to clarify the purpose Enduring Liberty, convention spokesperson and leader of the Memphis Tea Party, Mark Skoda claimed, "We're not attempting to replace the RNC, we're not attempting to co-opt the RNC… [We are] working to build a sustainable coalition of elected officials, first at the national level and then the state and locally to impact races by focusing on those offline regions that the RNC, NRCC or senatorial campaigns have not." Again, the convention organizers explicitly argued that the goal of the Tea Party Movement should be to elect conservative politicians. Skoda finished his comments by saying the PAC seeks to "reflect the aspirations of the grass roots movements that are not connected to the traditional party apparatus," though

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[220] Alex Pappas, "Tea Party convention leaders announce formation of political action committee," *The Daily Caller*, February 7, 2010, sec. Breaking News, http://dailycaller.com/2010/02/05/tea-party-convention-leaders-announce-formation-of-political-action-committee/.

"there is no interest in creating any third-party movement."[221] This last comment gives us the most insight into the thinking of the convention organizers. The goal of the movement was not just to elect politicians that reflected the values of Tea Party activists; it was to elect Republican politicians that shared those values. All of the convention speakers, except for Palin, explicitly stated that if the Republican Party did not make dramatic changes, it would also suffer the wrath of the movement. But by stating that their PAC had no interest in creating a third-party movement, the convention organizers were ruling out the possibility that the movement needed to look outside of the Republican Party for its leadership.

In this context, the decision to build the convention around Palin's address was consistent with the convention organizer's goals for the Tea Party Movement. Phillips and Skoda wanted to mainstream the movement into the Republican Party as part of a rebranding strategy. Palin's speech did exactly that.

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[221] Ibid.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

Whether or not one believes that Judson Phillips was justified in organizing a national convention for the Tea Party Movement, it is hard to argue that convention was not an important event in the history of the movement. Excluding the Tea Party March on Washington, the National Tea Party Convention was the first event organized for Tea Party protestors outside of local rallies. The movement had no national leader or agenda. There was no definitive voice determining what the movement stood for or what its goals were. In this context, the national convention was important if for no other reason because it filled this vacuum. It is true that the convention organizers did not seek permission from other tea party groups to host a convention. It might even be true that the views of the speakers did not reflect the majority of the other activists' views. However, the thoughts and views expressed at this convention would be broadcast by all the major news networks, and the Americans watching would have a way to make sense of the movement besides observing the eclectic array of local protests across the country.

The Tea Party Movement does not function as a traditionally radical conservative movement, judging by the standards suggested in previous scholarly literature in literature investigating value-oriented movements, ideological protest movements, and right-wing extremist movements. Movements of these types call for a fundamental re-ordering of society. The movement leaders understand any normative changes demanded in this broader context. Normative change cannot be the only means of achieving the movement's goals.

In the American context, these movements use radical rhetoric that employs ideological argument, historical simplism, conspiracy theories, and anti-pluralist discourse. They depict human beings as perfectible instruments of divine will and any behavior deviating from this will as evidence of evil intent. In these moralistic struggles between good and evil, there is no room for compromise. Actors who disagree with the substance of the radical ideology or have a different interpretation of historical events are cast not simply as mistaken but are intentionally deceptive. Most of the important speeches delivered at the convention were consistent with this type of rhetoric. Tancredo, Farrah, Breitbart, and Milloy all saw the movement as having radical, transformative designs. But Palin's speech, the centerpiece of the convention, was inconsistent with that view.

The convention organizers constructed the convention around Palin's address. Yet, her rhetoric seemed to contradict everything else about the convention. Her speech did not conform to the model set by the other speakers. She did not adopt important aspects of the prophetic voice, nor did she employ conspiracy discourse. Instead, Palin adopted the priestly voice in an effort to meet the unique situational exigency she faced. She depicted policy differences with liberals, not as a moral war, but as a difference of opinion. When she could, she identified points of agreement between Republicans and Democrats, and when she could not, she emphasized civility and decorum. She retold the history of the Republican Party in simplistic ways, often effacing important nuance.

However, she used these narratives to defend the old order instead of destroying it.

But if the goal of the organizers was to mainstream the movement, why invite the radicals at all? Would it not make more sense to flank Palin with other moderate politicians? I argue that the convention organizers surrounded Palin with radicals for two reasons. First, surrounding Palin with radicals might have made her message even more persuasive. While the Tea Party Movement did not have a clearly defined agenda or a leader, Tea Party activists had general understandings of what the movement was about. While different sects disagreed over precisely which issues to focus on, there seemed to be general agreement that the country (defined in various ways) was moving (interpreted at various speeds) to the left (fiscally, and or socially). One consistent theme in much of the rhetoric coming from various public figures associated with the movement was the idea that the movement was not directly associated with the Republican Party. Many activists saw the movement as more radical than traditional conservatism. Indeed, many identified the Republicans as part of the problem. Had all the speakers at the convention argued that the movement needed to find a more permanent home in the Republican Party, participants might have interpreted that rhetoric as an attempt at cooption.

By surrounding Palin with more radical voices, her argument may have been perceived less as cooption, and more as the reasonable middle. Condit and Lucaites have argued that, during the Civil Rights Movement, the radical rhetoric of Malcolm X reworked the public vocabulary, changing the meaning of the

ideograph <equality>, allowing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to redeploy this redefined ideograph to further the cause of the movement. While the American audience may have praised King and castigated Malcolm X, the rhetoric they heard was a synthesis of both speakers.[222] I am not arguing that either Palin or the more radical speakers used ideographs in ways that significantly changed their meanings. My point rather, is that sometimes audiences synthesize rhetorical messages into new messages that might be more persuasive than the sum of its parts. In the case of Palin, the audience might have understood Palin's call for unity with the Republican Party in the context of the prophetic and conspiratorial rhetoric emanating from the other speeches.

The second reason is that if the strategy of the organizers was successful and the convention served as the bridge that connected the Tea Party Movement and the Republican mainstream, the Republican Party might be perceived by many as adopting dramatic changes to accommodate a populist movement. The relationship between the success of radical social movements and the major parties in the United States is typically viewed in one of three ways: either the party adopts the movement's platform in order to co-opt it, the party adopts the movement's platform in an attempt at being responsive, but at the same time, reduces support for the movement, or the party ignores the movement and it becomes more radical and powerful political force. In all scenarios, the focus is on the actions of the state, and not on the actions of the movement. This investigation suggests that perhaps we should focus on the behavior of

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[222] Celest Condit and John Louis Lucaites, *Crafting equality: America's anglo-african word* (University of Chicago Press, 1993).

movements and how they contribute to the level of popularity in political parties. If it is true that the convention organizers designed the National Tea Party Convention in order to set Sarah Palin to become the leader of the movement, and it is true that they had some that her message would be much less radical than the other speakers, we can argue that they viewed the movement as way to boost the appeal of the Republican Party.

I define a pseudo-movement as a movement that uses radical, ideological, or extremist rhetoric, in combination with moderate or deliberative rhetoric, in order to manufacture the perception that a political party has been responsive to their demands. Leaders of pseudo-movements use rhetoric that gives the appearance that their movements have broader societal goals when, in reality, their goals are strictly normative. In my conceptual model of a pseudo-movement, the distinction between the rhetoric of the top-level leadership and the perceptions and intentions of the lower-level leadership and protestors is very important. It is possible that many participants at the national convention, including the keynote speakers themselves, believed that the purpose of the event was to energize a movement with broad societal goals. But it is also possible that the movement's top-level leadership, in this case, the convention organizers, merely intended for the movement to serve a normative function. Thus, the agency of the speakers and protestors may have been circumscribed by the designs of top-level leaders.

By calling this class of movement a pseudo-movement, I am not implying that is it not a genuine social movement. Trying to distinguish between true and

false movements is a feckless pursuit. Besides, many of the people engaged in the movement believed in what they were doing. They invested in the movement, physically and symbolically, and were persuaded by the movement leaders that due to a change in circumstances a change in strategy was necessary.

Examining the pseudo-movement function is significant primarily for two reasons. First, analyzing the Tea Party Movement through the framework of pseudo-movements gives us insight into the movement. Using this concept as a lens, we can understand certain decisions as calculated efforts to generate a synthesized rhetoric, instead of seemingly random and ill-advised rhetorical moves. Using previous frameworks, the National Tea Party Convention might have been interpreted as a half-hearted effort to give shape to a diverse and conflicted movement. The convention organizers might have been depicted as amateurs with no idea how to organize a convention, or worse, predators looking to turn a quick profit off of the trusting participants (each paying over three hundred dollars for admission). By contrast, using a pseudo-movement framework, the convention might be perceived as an artful attempt to mainstream an extremist movement. Likewise, the convention architects might be seen as skilled organizers.

Second, I have shown that pseudo-movement rhetoric is distinct from the rhetoric of ideological protest movements, value-oriented movements, and right-wing extremist movements. While pseudo-movement rhetoric bears numerous similarities to these other classes of movements, the disjuncture between the intentions of top-level leaders and other movement participants is what makes

them distinct. Thus, we can add the rhetoric of pseudo-movements to the continuum of movement rhetoric established by Smith and Windt over thirty years ago. This might serve as a step toward a more comprehensive theory of social movement rhetoric. Such steps are drastically called for to bring movement studies out of their critical stall.

By identifying the Tea Party Movement as an example of a pseudo-movement, we can make some preliminary observations about the inception stage of a pseudo-movement. The top-level leadership of pseudo-movements are likely to select venues where they can showcase speakers that use moderate political rhetoric in order to set them up to become leaders of the movement. They are likely to surround those potential leaders with speakers that employ significantly more radical rhetoric.

This analysis was limited by the availability of data. Not all of the convention proceedings were televised or transcribed. I gathered most of the data by transcribing the speeches from videos on YouTube and other multimedia sites. Because I did not have transcripts of every speech delivered at the convention, I could not confirm or deny the use of radical rhetoric by other speakers at the convention. This shortcoming is not terribly significant considering the fact that I was able to transcribe the speeches from the most well known speakers at the convention. I can say with certainty that the prophetic voice and the use of conspiracy discourse were consistent themes at the convention, but I cannot specify exactly how consistent they were without seeing

the other speeches. Future studies of the Tea Party Movement would benefit from having access to all of the speeches delivered at conventions.

Another limitation is that this study only examines the inception phase of the Tea Party Movement. Previous scholarly literature suggests that the rhetoric of social movements may change significantly over time.[223] The Tea Party Movement is in its initial stages and the use radical rhetoric employed by potential leaders may increase or decrease in frequency. A longitudinal study of the Tea Party movement may be instructive, especially as the members of the movement continue to become involved in electoral politics. The level of success these members have may have a significant impact on whether the movement becomes more radical or more moderate over time.

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[223] Charles Stewart, "The internal rhetoric of the Knights of Labor," *Communication Studies* 42, no. 1 (1991): 67-82.

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