THE IDEAL SOCIETY – AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PREFERRED

MECHANISMS OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF TEA PARTY

AND OCCUPY MOVEMENT MEMBERS

By

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Submitted to the

Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences
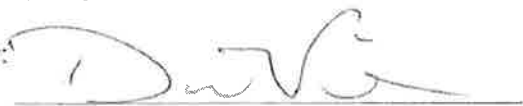
of American University

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In

Public Anthropology

Chair:

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Dean of The College

August 7, 2013

Date

2013

American University

Washington, D.C. 20016

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ABSTRACT

The Tea Party and Occupy movements perceive similar problems in the current social structure of the United States while citing different causes of and solutions to those problems. This study asked six participants from each movement to describe their "ideal society" to illuminate their preferred mechanisms of social organization. The results demonstrate that the participants from Occupy and the Tea Party share: a belief in education as an impediment to, and a strategy for, the improvement of society; a desire for a social structure governed from the bottom up rather than the top down; and a perception of a lack of representation in political affairs. The results also demonstrate that study participants in the Occupy movement distrust current social institutions and favor eliminating them, whereas Tea Party participants value current institutions and aim to repopulate these institutions with people that share their philosophy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

The purpose of this study is not to evaluate the relative merits of the policies or politics of either the Tea Party or the Occupy movement. My desire to study these groups stems from a combination of factors: a general interest in the processes involved in advocating for and achieving social change; an academic interest in social power structures and how they are contested or maintained; and an ambition to eventually resolve my own conflicting and often contradictory philosophies for how to improve human society. Thus the purpose of this study is to advance the understanding of how individuals involved in these movements were motivated to action, and what criteria they would employ to determine the success of their action.

Though I have made every effort to minimize my own biases, those biases nevertheless exist and may, despite my best efforts, affect how I conducted this study and my subsequent analysis of the data I collected. I thought it prudent therefore to provide some insight into my own philosophy and background so that the reader can catch me in my failings.

Political/Social Philosophy

The concept of the linear left-right political spectrum is, from my perspective, an unfortunate simplification of a complex matrix of influences which constitutes each person's political and social framework. Any individual's political and social framework is influenced by a number of factors, including: family values, social and geographical location, the broader culture in which they are embedded, and their own unique experiences in life. For example, I have been accused of being overly conservative by some friends because I enjoy owning guns and hunting – likewise I have been branded a socialist by other friends for my support of social welfare programs and a progressive tax code.

I am the son of a lawyer from Dayton, Ohio and a homemaker from Salzburg, Austria. I have lived my entire life in Virginia, and have traveled to many places around the globe. I am attracted to philosophies of self-determination yet agree with the notion that many (if not most) regulations serve to increase rather than impinge on my freedoms. Though I am in favor of progressive taxation I am wary of how and for whom the government spends the tax money it collects. I am, in principle, against state interference in personal activity (including who you want to have a relationship with, what substances you want to put in your body, and who you choose to associate with), yet I do not consider limited regulation or guiding of those activities to be inherently interfering. I believe in the right to protest and the right to privacy, and am against preemptive aggression and prior restraint of expression. I believe that using the power of the state to maintain the basic needs of the population is a good thing, but using it to increase the power of the powerful is a recipe for social disorder. I do not see a person in poverty and presume them intellectually or morally deficient, nor do I see a person on Park Avenue and presume them intellectually or morally superior.

It is of course not possible for me in this brief space to adequately contextualize my entire political and social philosophy. I would summarize my motivating philosophy as the desire to promote the conditions which will allow for the best lives for the greatest number of people, and one that presumes as a matter of course that this goal does not require the destruction of the lives of others to become reality. I am also a student and admirer of the founders of the United States, who despite their many flaws often accounted for their own fallibility in their stated philosophies. This is well illustrated by Thomas Jefferson's words from a letter to Samuel Kercheval:

> I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and Constitutions. But laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that

becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. [Ford 1905a.]

Anthropological Perspective

My anthropological perspective is firmly rooted in the idea that anthropological knowledge has a practical use in promoting positive change in society. The origins of the field were rooted in the observation of "exotic" societies for the varying purposes of intellectual interest in world cultures, support for racist and nationalistic philosophies of superiority, or active information gathering intended to ease colonization or eradication of specific groups. Later anthropologists illuminated the nature and structure of cultures around the world for various purposes, focused on observation over intervention with an adherence to the philosophy of cultural relativity – the idea that one cannot view another's culture but through the prism of their own. Flowing from this philosophy is the conclusion that the validity of judgments about other cultures and the wisdom of intervening in the affairs of those cultures, no matter how well-intentioned, is problematic at best. I support the concept of cultural relativity in the abstract, and consider it the best default position for any person, anthropologist or otherwise, to assume when dealing with people and cultures other than their own.

However, an activist anthropology by its very definition cannot hold cultural relativity as an absolute. Consider an anthropologist that works to change policies that disadvantage those in poverty in favor of the wealthy. The wealthy themselves are embedded in and actively construct their own culture, and that culture influences how they use their wealth to maintain their identities. Do they not have the right to protect their way of living? The answer, if strictly following cultural relativity, is yes they do. So an activist anthropologist that pursues change

that will alter the position of a particular group takes a stance that is, by definition, in opposition to one of more groups and the concept of cultural relativity more generally.

It is my hope that this section has provided some context for this project. Please feel free to contact me at patrick@patrickirelan.com if you have any questions or concerns.

INTRODUCTION

A few months prior to the 2010 U.S. elections, a man approached me at an ice cream parlor and asked if I was in town for the Tea Party rally. I responded that I was not aware of the rally and he immediately suggested that I should attend. "We've got to rescue our country," he insisted, and proceeded to list a number of threats to "our way of life." This man was animated and passionate as he spoke, explaining with conviction and sincerity how Barack Obama was a Muslim who had hijacked the election, how the Republicans were secretly in league with the President while feigning opposition in order to co-opt the Tea Party movement, and how the U.N. was implementing a world government with the intention of influencing domestic U.S. policy. "This is not the society I want to live in," he said. The question then is: What society does he want to live in?

Though the political climate of the United States has become increasingly polarized over the last few decades (Hirschl et al. 2012), this polarization appears to have sharply increased in the wake of two events during late 2008 – the worldwide financial collapse and the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States (Walker 2011; Fax 2012; Roberts 2012; Lundskow 2012). The increased vulnerability of the middle class after the collapse of the economy combined with the government bailouts of the same financial institutions whose business practices contributed to this collapse laid the foundation for the emergence of first the Tea Party and later Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and the greater Occupy movement (Fax 2012; Razsa and Kurnik 2012:239; Teltumde 2011; Nugent 2012:281). A review of the literature in the following section includes an examination of how the events of 2008 allowed long-simmering apprehensions among both conservatives and liberals to boil over into active and consequential social movements. However, the literature on both movements focuses primarily on the origins,

processes, and social significance of these movements. Equally important to understand are the ideological formations each group has coalesced around, how they view the current distribution of power in the United States and how they would choose to organize society given the opportunity.

Members of both the Tea Party and the Occupy movements have been vocal about their proposed policy changes and their grievances with the current organization of U.S. society (Walker 2011; Roberts 2012; Nugent 2012; Langman 2011), yet their proposals have been filtered by a largely corporate-controlled media and formulated within the context of reforming or attacking the status quo. A deeper understanding of the processes and motivations that have led to the formation of each of these groups is predicated on a more accurate assessment of how these groups would organize U.S. society given no limitations imposed by social or cultural standards other than those they place on themselves. In other words, what society do they want to live in?

So instead of understanding how they would chip away at what they perceive as flaws with the status quo, how would they organize their "ideal society" from scratch in order to eliminate the core social structures that allow for these perceived flaws to emerge and be maintained? Asking members of these groups to describe, in detail, how they would organize U.S. society is a mechanism intended to help reveal the philosophies of social organization held by members of these groups, the degree of in-group and cross-group variation between these philosophies, and points of commonality. The resulting data may inform related research on the social processes at work that gave rise to these movements, as well as the development or refinement of theoretical models that are applicable to research on similar or future social movements.

Both the Tea Party and Occupy movements share, at least superficially, ideals related to minimal interference from an organized state, the power of community over state, and the value of self-organization and determination (Juris 2012:272; Fax 2012:336). Mickey, an Occupy member interviewed for this study, suggests that "We don't need these giant state structures." This sentiment is echoed by Tea Party member Susan, who believes that the federal government needs "to downsize and they need to stop trying to push their agenda on the United States." Similarly, both groups, in contradiction to these previously stated ideals, allow for some degree of exertion of control over others (though to what degree varies significantly between participants in this study) (Fax 2012:336; Nugent 2012:282-283). The data I collected supports the notion that both groups seek to expand local determination while reducing or eliminating centralized state power. However, their methods for achieving these goals diverge significantly, which, along with a culturally-derived mistrust of each other, has thus far prevented cooperation towards shared goals.

The majority of the participants interviewed for this study were local to the Washington, DC metropolitan area (including parts of Maryland and Virginia). What I discovered speaking with them was that for many participants the notion of an ideal society was difficult or impossible to conceptualize, while for others it existed as a clear vision in their minds. Taking into consideration the fact that each of these participants are actively engaged in promoting positive change, the difference in their conceptions of what an ideal society may look like and the steps required to achieve that society are telling. For some, the vision is clear but the processes murky. For others, the vision is impossible, but their faith in the processes is strong. All participants, however, felt compelled to act to promote positive change in their communities and the society at large.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HISTORY

Historical and Economic Context

"Instead of wealth trickling down, as we were promised in the Reagan years when 'supply-side economics' came into vogue, insecurity is trickling up the social ladder" (Gusterson and Besteman 2010:3). An understanding of the historical and economic context out of which the Tea Party and Occupy movements emerged is important to any interpretation of how their members would like to see society organized. The instability of the middle class and the steady reduction in opportunities for upward mobility became a stark reality for many after the financial collapse of 2008 but have their roots in a shift from a Fordist-style economy to the current neoliberal paradigm (Gusterson and Besteman 2010:3-5).

Named for auto manufacturing pioneer Henry Ford, Fordism was the prevailing economic and corporate principle throughout most of the 20th century. This economic philosophy was based on Henry Ford's notion that the workers in his factories should be able to afford and enjoy the products they produced. As such, Ford ensured "high wages and a forty-hour work week in exchange for high levels of productivity" (Gusterson and Besteman 2010:3). The workers' salaries and increased leisure time in turn drove other sectors of the consumerist economy. Combined with carefully managed fiscal policy on the part of the U.S. government and deals worked out between labor unions and corporate management to secure benefits and job security, this system served to ensure social and economic stability and prosperity for many years (Gusterson and Besteman 2010).

However, starting in the 1980s, the Fordist system unraveled as U.S. President Ronald Reagan and United Kingdom Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher spearheaded the deregulation of financial markets while at the same time labor unions began to lose political effectiveness due to

the movement of jobs to countries with cheaper, non-unionized labor (Gusterson and Besteman 2010:4). This new form of economic organization based on the principles of deregulation and maximization of profits came to be called neoliberalism, and it remains the prevailing economic and corporate principle of the global economy to this day. One significant result of the implementation of neoliberal philosophy has been the rapid redistribution of wealth from the middle class to an increasingly small elite: "By 2001 the top one percent of U.S. society claimed a fifth of the nations income and a third of all net worth – their largest share since 1929" (Gusterson and Besteman 2010:4).

Coincident to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small number of people has been the stagnation of social mobility. This has been most acutely felt by the middle class, who have not only less hope of increasing their station in life but greater fear of losing what they have already attained. Even prior to the financial collapse of 2008, members of the middle class "found themselves clinging to their class status in increasingly tenuous ways" including "working longer hours…sinking deeper into credit card debt…relying on the cheap labor of immigrants, and by replacing American-made consumer durables with less expensive imports from China" (Gusterson and Besteman 2010:5). Perhaps most significantly, many in the middle class poured what wealth they had into their homes, and then borrowed against their housing equity to maintain their lifestyles only to see the housing bubble burst and the value of their homes collapse in 2008. This collapse resulted in an acceleration of the shifting foundations of the U.S. social order which had begun in the 1980s, and laid the groundwork for new social movements to come to the fore.

History and Formation: Occupy

Occupy Wall Street, the most well-known of the occupations, did not emerge out of a vacuum in a direct response to the financial collapse, despite its initial focus on protesting the financial sector. Rather, "it was made possible by a 'prehistory' that included the "world Social Forum as well as a variety of domestic U.S. campaigns," (Calhoun 2013:28) and inspired by international movements which preceded it. Craig Calhoun states that in 2010, "as the [financial] crisis spread to Greece, Spain, Portugal and other parts of Eurozone…occupation of prominent public spaces was a central dimension of activism" (2013:27-28). The protests in Cairo also served as inspiration. Adbusters, a Canadian independent magazine which played a prominent role in the instigation of the protests (see below), sent out an email to its subscribers stating that "America needs its own Tahrir."[1]

The Occupy movement, and specifically the concepts of "direct action and horizontal democracy" can be traced to "the ideas and tactics of the global justice movement of the 1990s and 2000s," (Marcus 2012:57), with the most notable example being the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle. However, the history of anti-corporate movements stretches back much further into U.S. history, with Thomas Jefferson declaring "I hope we shall crush… in its birth the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations, which dare already to challenge our government to a trial of strength and bid defiance to the laws of our country." (Ford 1905b). William Jennings Bryan, though unsuccessful in his many bids for political office, nevertheless popularized "the progressive income tax, a flexible currency, and support for labor organizing" (Kazin 2012:68). President Roosevelt successfully incorporated social safety nets, including Social Security, into the fabric of U.S. society. Lyndon Johnson followed with the

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[1]   Referring the Tahrir Square, the site of the protests in Cairo, Egypt, which ultimately forced President Hosni Mubarak out of power.

implementation of Medicare. Even the lack of specific demands, a hallmark of the Occupy

movement (Bennett 2011), had precedence in the Port Huron Statement. This document,

authored in 1962 by the group Students for a Democratic Society, was influenced by lead author

Tom Hayden's belief that the movement should "remain ambiguous in direction for a

while…when consciousness is at its proper stage, we might talk seriously and in an action-

oriented way about solutions" (Schwartz 2011).

   The seeds of the Occupy movement were planted in the early summer of 2011 when "a

group of artists, activists, writers, students, and organizers gathered on the fourth floor of 16

Beaver Street, an artists' space near Wall Street, to talk about changing the world" (Kroll

2011:16). In attendance was anthropologist David Graeber, who would later be credited as one

of Occupy's "chief theoretical architects" (Marcus 2012:56). After the occupation of Zuccotti

Park began, Graeber explained that "The idea is essentially that 'the system is not going to save

us,' so 'we're going to have to save ourselves'" (Marcus 2012:56-57). Graeber was attuned to

the effect of finance on society due to his academic focus on the nature and history of debt. He

responded to the protests in Cairo by writing a piece in Adbusters in mid-July which asked "what

it would take to trigger a similar uprising in the West" (Bennett 2011). Shortly after publishing

Graeber's piece, Adbusters editor Kalle Lasn and his associate Micah White called for "a Wall

Street occupation" (Bennett 2011).[2]

   Adbusters magazine is described by Mathias Schwartz as a periodical that "depicts the

developed world as a nightmare of environmental collapse and spiritual hollowness driven to the

brink of destruction by its consumer appetites" (Schwartz 2011). It was Lasn and White who

called for an American Tahrir. On June 9, 2011, they registered the website

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[2]   In fact, there was an attempt at a long-term encampment that occupied a space in front of New York City
Hall in June of 2011 to protest cuts to education and public services (Kroll 2011: 17). It was called
"Bloombergville," a reference to New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and lasted one week.

www.occupywallstreet.org (Schwartz 2011). Though White proposed scheduling the occupation for July 4, 2012 to allow more time for organizing and recruitment, Lasn "believed that the political climate could have shifted entirely by then" (Schwartz 2011). The two eventually settled on Lasn's mother's birthday, September 17.

During their deliberations on how to "change the world," the group at 16 Beaver Street had decided to form what they called the New York City General Assembly (NYC-GA) (Kroll 2011:19). This new group was modeled on the horizontal organization of Spain's 15-M movement (which had formed in protest of their country's response to the fiscal crisis) (Kroll 2011:17). As opposed to "vertical" types of organization which relied on small cadres of leaders, the NYC-GA stringently opposed hierarchy of any kind, and instead focused on reaching "consensus" for all decisions (Marcus 2012:57; Kroll 2011:18; Bennett 2011; Schwartz 2011). Though my interviews with Occupy participants show varying degrees of adherence to this horizontal philosophy, it became the model for the occupation of Zuccotti Park and the many occupations of public space that protest inspired around the world.

Ultimately, it was Adbuster's promotion of the idea of occupation (which had spread quickly via social media and word of mouth) combined with the organizational efforts of the group from 16 Beaver Street and the NYC-GA that "made Occupy Wall Street a reality" (Kroll 2011:19). On September 17, 2011 the occupation of Zuccotti Park began, and lasted until the protestors were removed by police on November 15. During that time, the newly formed community influenced action on the part of people around the United States as well as globally and amplified the debate about whether or not the current system of social organization in the country was working for the population.

History and Formation: Tea Party

The Tea Party derives its name from the Boston Tea Party, which took place on December 16, 1773. The British parliament had instituted the British Tea Act of 1773 which permitted the East India Company (a nominally private corporation) to "export tea to the colonies without paying tax on it" (Sharpe 2010:128). Though the colonists would pay less for tea as a result, they reacted furiously at the unilateral action by a distant power which they perceived would cripple the American tea trade (Sharpe 2010:128). Although the modern Tea Party advocates for reduced taxation, invoking the spirit of the Boston Tea party evoked the lack of representation in political affairs perceived by many in the Tea Party movement.

The Tea Party is not "a party with a capital 'P' in the sense of a third party" (Arrillaga 2012), but rather a collection of individuals, local and regional groups, and national organizations. The first of the contemporary Tea Party groups formed in the immediate aftermath of the election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States, and in close proximity to both the world-wide financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent bailouts of banks and large corporations by the U.S. government (Zeskind 2012:496). Originally started as anti-tax protests funded and organized by Congressman Dick Armey's FreedomWorks organization (Zeskind 2011:496) and David Koch's Americans for Prosperity (Fallin et al. 2012:1), the Tea Party quickly expanded and evolved to include six national organizations[3] and "thousands (the exact number is contested) of local and state groups" (Zeskind 2011:497).

The Tea Party is a contemporary expression of a democratic populism which has a long history within the United States (Courser 2012:43-44). Though individual Tea Party members and groups have differing agendas, they largely share in common the belief that they have been

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[3] The six national organizations are the Tea Party Patriots, FreedomWorks Tea Party, Tea Party Nation, Patriot Action Network, 1776 Tea Party (also known as teaparty.org), and the Tea Party Express (Zeskind, 2011:497).

"marginalized by what is perceived as an unrepresentative political system" (Courser 2011:44). In addition to the aforementioned Boston Tea Party, this concern over representation was voiced during the founding of the United States by those who opposed the federal system for fear that it placed too much distance "between citizens and government" (Courser 2011:46). The debate over how well elected representatives can understand and advocate for those they represent has continued to varying degrees ever since.

Though Tea Party rallies were first held after the inauguration of President Obama, recent research suggests that the origins of the Tea Party can be traced to an organization called Citizens for a Sound Economy (CSE). Co-founded by David Koch of Koch Industries in 1984 (Fallin et al. 2012:3), CSE was funded by a coalition of tobacco companies to "engineer and organize 'grassroots'" advocacy against regulation of "tobacco and other air pollutants" (Webster 2013). CSE led and funded multiple third-party groups in advocating against the Environmental Protection Agency, the Food and Drug Administration, and President Bill Clinton's efforts at healthcare reform throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as well as other efforts designed to promote deregulation and free markets (Fallin et al. 2012:4).

In a 1992 memo Gary Auxier, a public relations representative working for Phillip Morris, outlined a plan to combat proposed taxes on tobacco products (and on corporate profits in general) by cultivating a populist anti-tax movement. He wrote, "Grounded in the theme of 'The New American Tax Revolution' or 'The New Boston Tea Party,' the campaign activity should take the form of citizens representing the widest constituency base mobilized with signage and other attention-drawing accoutrements such as lapel buttons, handouts, petitions and even costumes" (Fallin et al. 2012:3). In 2002, CSE registered the domain name USTeaParty.com (Webster 2013).

In 2004, CSE split into two separate entities, Americans for Prosperity and FreedomWorks, with the former being led by David Koch and the latter by former Republican house majority leader Dick Army. In 2007, Army suggested using "the Boston Tea Party as a model of grassroots pressure on an overbearing central government" (Fallin et al. 2012:5). It was Americans for Prosperity and FreedomWorks who "played an important role in structuring and supporting the Tea Party in the initial stages" (Fallin et al. 2012:1). FreedomWorks "organized the nationwide Tea Party tax protests in April 2009, the town hall protests about the proposed healthcare reform in August 2009, and the Taxpayers' March on Washington the following September 2009" (Fallin et al. 2012:1). Both organizations continue to provide financial and logistical support, including the development of talking points, to local Tea Party groups around the country (Fallin et al. 2012:1).

The Taxpayers' March on Washington provided both a public demonstration of the breadth of the Tea Party and allowed members from around the country to meet and begin to collaborate. It also had the effect of beginning a transformation of the Tea Party "into a more sophisticated but no less determined movement with definable electoral goals" (Zeskind 2012:499). In the 2010 midterm elections, the Tea Party contributed to the successful takeover of the House of Representatives by the Republican Party. Moreover, the movement's influence in local elections resulted in the ousting of many establishment Republicans in favor of candidates who appealed to the platform supported by the Tea Party. This shift in the political demographics of the Republican caucus has had a significant effect on policymaking over the past three years.

Periodic suggestions that the Tea Party had lost effectiveness gained more traction after the 2012 elections in which President Obama retained the presidency, and Republicans suffered

significant losses in both the House and the Senate. However, constitutional law professor

Elizabeth Price Foley states that the Tea Party is "in the fabric of every community. You may not

see it, because they're not holding signs. But they're there…[and] they're in it for the long haul"

(Arrillaga 2012). Sociologist Theda Skocpol echoes this statement, noting that Tea Party

members are no longer "dressing up and going to demonstrations in the street. They're meeting.

They're poring over the legislative records of these Republicans that they've elected. They're

contacting their representatives, and they're keeping the pressure on. They're following the

debates, and they're going and they're voting. They're determined and they haven't gone away"

(Arrillaga 2012).

Literature Review: Social Movement Theory

There is a long history of scholarship across a number of fields about the formation and

operation of social movements. Sociology, history, and political science have been the

traditional home to much of this scholarship and continue to provide the bulk of the research in

this area. Anthropologist Marc Edelman explains the limited contribution of anthropology to this

area of study:

> In part, anthropologists' marginal involvement in discussions of collective action
> reflected an academic division of labor that assigned them peasants, the urban
> (especially Third World) poor, ethnic minorities, and millenarian or syncretic
> religious sects and allocated other types of mobilization (and national-level
> phenomena) to sociologists, political scientists, or historians. [2001:286.]

Furthermore, anthropology's use of ethnography and its focus on the micro-level interactions

between individuals and disparate stakeholders within a given group also limit the creation of

"grand theoretical" theories and generalizations that are attractive to those seeking to mobilize

successful social movements and those who would combat them (Edelman 2001:286).

David J. Hess suggests that "anthropologists use theoretical concepts as a means for the elaboration of the specifics of a case, whereas sociologists tend to use the case as the grounds for developing generalizations" (2007:464). So theories related to social movements in anthropology can illuminate the broader contours of specific social movements. Hess provides a useful generalization: "the anthropological study of social movements is well positioned to contribute to understanding the place of charged cultural repertoires – that is, meaningful historical events and narratives that are involved to interpret new political struggles and to provide maps for future action" (2007:465). Ethnographic research with members of social movements can provide insight into the broader social-historical context – just as that context itself informs and affects the motivations and actions of people mobilizing for change.

What constitutes a social movement? Do the Tea Party and Occupy movements qualify, or are they best understood in different terms? Hess provides the following definition:

> Social movements can be distinguished from related forms of social action by their goal of fundamental social change (in contrast with interest groups), broad scope (in contrast with smaller activist networks and short-term campaigns), and extrainstititutional action such as protest and civil disobedience (in contrast with the institutionalized advocacy work of reform movements) [2007:466.]

Calhoun provides another definition, saying, "Movements are relatively long-term collective engagements in producing or guiding social change" (2013:26). Both the Tea Party and Occupy movements possess characteristics which might disqualify them as social movements as defined by Hess and Calhoun. Occupy has been described by Todd Gitlin as "perhaps more moment than movement," for example, and some suggest that this moment has passed (Calhoun 2013:26), arguably failing both Calhoun's and Hess' criteria for sustained action. The Tea Party to date has persisted organizationally, yet adheres closely to current institutions and the tactic of

working intra-institutionally to achieve their goals, goals which Tea Party participants interviewed for this paper describe as reform (Irelan 2013).

However, the interviews I conducted provide evidence that both groups can rightly be described as social movements. With regard to sustained action, Calhoun states that "Movements often proceed in alternating phase of intense public action and seeming dormancy, and much of the work that shapes the long term is in fact done during what appears superficially to be mere spaces between waves of activism" (2013:26). Occupy continues to function even in a state of exile from their public occupations, as demonstrated by the existence of volunteers for this study and the activities they continue to engage in under the Occupy banner. Deprived of their public presence, "the media lost interest, lending the impression that the movement no longer exists" (Schneider 2012:14). Yet the members that participated in this study remain active within the movement, attending meetings and developing new projects and fresh ways to employ the "networks and trust" formed between activists (Schneider 2012:14).

The Tea Party, despite its focus on working through current institutions to reform them, nevertheless advocates for significant changes to the current model of social organization. While the Tea Party participants I interviewed shied away from notions of radicalism, they were nevertheless aggressive in advocating for a shift from the top-down power structure currently governing the United States to a grassroots-led, bottom-up form of governance. Though the participants often approached this change in terms of reverting back to concepts wrought during the founding of the United States, achieving their goal would justly be considered a radical break from the current paradigm of social organization. This fact, combined with the sustained activities of local groups and the loose confederation they form nationally, firmly places the Tea Party in the category of a social movement.

Literature Review: Occupy Movement

The bulk of research on the Occupy movement in anthropology and other fields has focused on the social processes that led to the formation of the group, the organizational aspects of how the group functions at the local, regional, and global levels, and the relevance of the movement with regard to the degree of its impact on policy and cultural attitudes. While these are important areas of study, less work has been geared towards understanding the aspirational aspects of the Occupy movement, whether at the individual or macro level. Specifically, I am following Jeffrey Juris' perscription that "the longer-term trajectory of Occupy will have to be empirically assessed through ongoing comparative ethnographic research" (2012:271).

However, to more fully understand the context out of which Occupy members' visions of an ideal society arises, it is necessary to analyze the historical roots of the movement, the motivations for its formation, and the social processes which have guided its operation. Though September 17, 2011 is seen as the "official" beginning of the Occupy movement (Juris 2012:261; Roberts 2012:755; Campbell 2011:42), it has its roots in the anti-globalization movement of the late 1990s and early 2000s (Roberts 2012:755), and more generally in the various movements and organizations which have formed to resist the neoliberal agenda over the past 30 years (Roberts 2012:754; Nugent 2012:281).

Yet despite the long history of groups forming in opposition to the restructuring of the world economy to fulfill the neoliberal agenda, including the expansion of free trade zones, the marginalization of labor unions, and the decoupling of investment from risk (Roberts 2012:754), the Occupy movement did not emerge until three years after the financial crisis. Calhoun voices surprise at the fact that "no major protests were occasioned directly by the massive market collapse of 2008, nor by the dubious and sometimes fraudulent practices that led to it…"

(Calhoun 2013:33). Ralph Nader asked "What took them so long?" (Van Gelder 2011:74) – a

question likely on the minds of many activists whose similar causes had failed to gain traction in

terms of sustained media coverage and growth of participation the way Occupy had. In fact,

there were protests and other forms of activist organizing taking place both before and after the

financial collapse, however these protests did not catch the public's attention the way Occupy

ultimately did (Kroll 2011). For Juris, the ability for Occupy to gain and maintain news

coverage and public interest is explained at least in part by the persistent physical occupation of

spaces, as opposed to one-off protests preceded and followed by virtual (electronic) organizing.

Juris also introduces the concept of the "emerging logics of aggregation":

> …networking technologies did more than facilitate the expansion of network
> forms; they shaped new political subjectivities based on the network as an
> emerging political and cultural ideal – that is to say, there was a confluence
> between network norms, forms, and technologies. The point was not that
> everyone used new media or that digital technologies completely transformed
> how social movements operate but that, as new media were incorporated into the
> ongoing practices of core groups of activists, they helped diffuse new dynamics of
> activism. [2012:260.]

Juris stresses that while social media and other forms of digital communication have facilitated

and transformed the way social movements coalesce around ideas generally, the true value of

these technologies was only realized when combined with face-to-face contact made viable by

the physical persistence of participants at sites of occupation (Juris 2012:260).

Bernard Harcourt asserts that the Occupy movement has "fashioned a new form of

political engagement" based on its "refusal to compromise with political power" (2013:46). He

calls this mode of political engagement "political disobedience" and contrasts this notion with

that of "civil disobedience." Harcourt states that "'civil disobedience' accepts the legitimacy of

the political structure and of our political institutions, but resists the moral authority of the

resulting laws" (2013:46). He continues, saying that "[civil disobedience] respects the legal

norm at the very moment of resistance, and places itself under the sanction of that norm" (2013:46). 'Political disobedience,' to the contrary, describes actions which "resist the very way in which we are governed," and ideologies that "[refuse] to willingly accept the sanctions meted out by our legal and political system" (2013:47). Harcourt quotes Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" to demonstrate that King disagreed with discriminatory laws but had faith in the system of governance within which those laws were created. Occupy, on the other hand, seeks to dispose of the current system of social organization for something entirely new.

David Nugent adds important context to the discussion of what prompted and has sustained the Occupy movement with his discussion about the "twin crisis of global capitalism and representative democracy" (2012:281). He describes how in addition to the breakdown of "material life" – in terms of access to food, healthcare, employment, and education – there has been a steady breakdown of the integrity of political life (Nugent 2012:281). Specifically, he explains how the influence of capital on the representative political system has "succeeded in compromising the very institutions that were developed to protect vulnerable groups – and to provide the general population with at least some voice in its own affairs" (Nugent 2012:281). Both the Tea Party and Occupy movements voice despair at the current workings of representative democracy (Nugent 2012; Lundskow 2012) and Nugent provides an excellent framework to examine the actions of both groups within the context of these "twin crises."

However, the concern surrounding the failure or cooption of government institutions that exist to protect vulnerable groups is not a new one. Women, minorities, the LGBT community, low income workers, indigenous communities - these and other groups have consistently and actively contested structures of social violence over the course of many years. The power of capital to influence the governing structures of society is well understood, and though Nugent

argues convincingly that power has grown at an increasing pace in recent years, Emahunn

Raheem Ali Campbell provides an additional theory about what was different this time around:

capitalism was no longer working for white middle class males (Campbell 2011). Campbell,

who identifies himself as a black #Occupier, discusses how the unemployment rate for black

Americans is double that of whites, yet it is the white unemployment rate which garners the

media attention and motivates white middle class men to become social activists. According to

this theory, the formation of Occupy was, at least in part, predicated on the dismantling of white

male middle class privilege. Campbell describes the "indifference" he and other people of color

encountered when attempting to bring up discussions concerning the presence of white privilege

within the Occupy movement and the feeling of tokenization many non-white male members felt

(Campbell 2011:46). It is necessary to understand the importance of white male privilege in the

formation and operation of the Occupy movement and how and to what degree that white male

privilege has been contested successfully both within the movement and in terms of philosophies

of social organization.

Literature Review: Tea Party Movement

A review of academic research on the Tea Party reveals that sociologists have taken the

lead in examining the movement, joined by contributions from the legal and political science

fields. While these contributions are important, the lack of an anthropological viewpoint is

evident and demonstrates the value of projects, like this one, which include ethnographic

research on the Tea Party.

There are clear similarities between the theories of formation of the Tea Party and the

Occupy movements, with the erosion of white male middle-class privilege being chief among

them. Lauren Langman argues that an understanding of the emergence of the Tea Party relies on a consideration of how "socio-economic and cultural changes have assaulted the values, lifestyles and very identities" of lower-middle class white males (Langman 2011:470). Langman cites the economic collapse as one condition which ripened pre-existing insecurities in this group; however she notes that the emergence of the Tea Party occurred following the election of the first African American president of the United States, which on top of economic troubles represented to many groups clear evidence of the erosion of white male privilege (Langman 2011). When examining Tea Party conceptions of the "ideal society" it is thus necessary to examine if and how the reassertion of white male privilege is manifested, whether overtly or implicitly.

Langman also provides an interesting analysis on the importance of relative social location to the formation of the Tea Party, echoing Bourdieu (1984): "The Tea Party can be understood as resisting 'evil' elites above and the 'dangerous classes' from below who threaten these people's moral, social, and economic status" (Langman 2011:470). This differs from the current understanding of the Occupy movement which, despite issues related to the subtle assertion of white privilege, overtly seeks to include and encourage the participation of both the lower and upper classes, ostensibly with the goal of erasing the divisions between the classes and rendering the distinction obsolete (Juris 2012:261). Langman argues that to understand the worldview of Tea Party members it is necessary to examine their perception of feeling squeezed from above and below, resulting in a form of social desperation which motivates action and organization (Langman 2011).

In addition to social location, spatial location has been described as an important factor in the formation of ideology. Michael Thompson argues that conservatives in general, and the Tea

Party in particular, develop their specific worldviews from the process of socialization within a suburban environment. Specifically, he theorizes that the increased isolation of suburban life leads to more conservative, individualistic philosophies of preferred social organization (Thompson 2012). However, he also notes that the power of the Tea Party derives from the "extraordinary homogeneity of their belief system" which stems from the "highly routinized, structured, and rule-governed nature of modern capitalist life" (Thompson 2012:512,513). Thompson presents quantitative data confirming the more conservative character of suburban areas with regard to elections, however his argument does not address the proportion of Occupy members and other liberal activists who were also socialized in suburban environments. Yet Thompson's work does provide framework for examining Tea Party conceptions of an ideal society.

George Lundskow states that the Tea Party's "simultaneous rejection of the established institutions of power, simplistic policy formulation, and condemnation of outgroups suggests a racially motivated authoritarianism and destructiveness rather than any particular political commitment" (Lundskow 2012:529). From this perspective, the Tea Party is less of a movement formed to advocate change than a reactionary manifestation of fear of losing white privilege. It is necessary to examine whether the responses collected from Tea Party members describing their ideal society support this view. Lundskow's argument that the Tea Party is fundamentally founded on authoritarian principles in contradiction to their stated abhorrence of state power would benefit from ethnographic data to support his claims. The data I have collected, while not statistically exhaustive, provides insight into the merits of this argument.

Clarence Walker describes the Tea Party as the most recent manifestation of "white victimology" which has its roots in Richard Nixon's pursuit of the "Southern Strategy" (Walker

2011:126). Walker, a historian, notes that while white hegemony remains intact, the election of

Barack Obama served as a demonstration that white privilege is no longer absolute. He argues

that an examination of the public institutions many members of the Tea Party wish to dismantle

betrays the inherent racism within the movement because of how those institutions (including the

Departments of Education, Energy, Environmental Protection, the Federal Reserve, and

programs like Social Security and Medicare) have traditionally played a role (with varying

degrees of success) in leveling the playing field for blacks and other minorities, as well as the

impoverished (Walker 2011:126-127).

METHODOLOGY

      The design of this study was determined by a combination of the data required for fruitful analyses and the limitations of resources and access to Tea Party and Occupy movement members at my disposal. Because I sought direct knowledge from active movement participants, interviews were a clear best choice for data collection. I used the conceit of the "ideal society" as an interview framework to help root the discussions in the participants' conceptions of how they envision society should work as an integrated system, as opposed to focusing on their views of specific contemporary policies and social structures. Despite the limitations described below, the study design proved successful in terms of expanding our knowledge of how participants describe their "ideal society" and the social processes and mechanisms they would employ to achieve that society.

Data Collection and Participant Recruitment

      I collected the required data via semi-structured ethnographic interviews supplemented by a self-administered demographic survey for each interviewee. Both groups had a cohort of six participants each for a total of 12 participants. Participants were recruited via a combination of solicitations on websites populated by Tea Party and/or Occupy members, and chain contacts from these initial contacts.

      There are hundreds of independent local Tea Party affiliates around the country, and most have their own website and mailing lists. I signed up for accounts on many Tea Party sites in the Washington, DC area and emailed the webmaster or media contacts on each site requesting help recruiting participants, which connected me with three of my participants. The other three Tea Party participants were recruited via the www.teapartypatriots.org website which is a social

media forum for Tea Party members across the United States. I created an account, filtered by localities near the Washington, DC area, and sent out solicitations for participation. Most of my solicitations were ignored but, save for one,[4] the responses I received were positive and polite.

Connecting with Occupy movement members at first seemed to be quite straight-forward. I emailed the media contact on the www.occupydc.org website who provided me the contact information for two members, both of whom enthusiastically agreed to speak with me. However, I encountered difficulty recruiting members for a number of weeks after these initial contacts. Solicitations on Twitter were unsuccessful, as were attempts at contacting those in charge of other Occupy-affiliated websites. Ultimately it was a chance meeting of a member of the American Communist Party at the American University Public Anthropology Conference which led to all four of my subsequent interviews. He was not himself a member of Occupy, but was in close contact with someone who was – that person subsequently introduced me to another member, who happened to live with yet more members, who themselves were able to connect me with yet others.

I asked each participant to read and sign the informed-consent form or confirm permission orally prior to starting the recorded interviews, which were administered either in person or over the phone. I changed all participant names for the purpose of publication of the data, and any comments from interviews which might risk identifying a participant to a general audience have been removed or redacted.

I included the demographic data survey to provide some potentially useful contextual data which might not have otherwise been collected during the interview process. Ultimately I did not use this data extensively in my analysis, save for data on age.

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[4]   One response contained a vitriolic attack on my character, asserting that I was in league with liberal elites to subvert the mission of the Tea Party. Out of numerous interactions with Tea Party members, this was the only response that was negative or aggressive. All other interactions were polite and friendly.

With regard to the validity of the data, I relied on participants for the accuracy of their responses. Because this study focuses on how each participant envisions her or his ideal society, potential problems related to validity were largely mitigated. I sensed nothing but sincerity from each and every participant I spoke with. The private, one-on-one nature of the interviews was intended to minimize external influence on each participant.

After some initial casual conversation with each participant, I gave a brief overview of my project, explaining that I was talking with members of both the Tea Party and the Occupy movements about how they would structure their "ideal society." I began each interview with the question "How would you organize U.S. society given no limitations imposed by social or cultural standards other than those you place on yourself?" and encouraged participants to take a moment to compose a response. These interviews were conversational in nature, and I pursued various lines of inquiry while paying special attention to remain on topic as best possible. I also asked guiding questions (Appendices:92) as needed to ensure each participant commented on those topics.

Interviews ranged in length from approximately 30 minutes to over two hours. Interview length was determined largely as a function of the time available to the participant and their engagement in the conversation. The longer interviews veered into areas which did not apply directly to this project but helped maintain a good rapport with the participants and were interesting in their own right. Shorter interviews were characterized by participants who had more straightforward responses to each question or limited time to speak.

It is important to note that the Occupy participants were generally more amenable to responding to the questions in the abstract, whereas the Tea Party participants preferred, by and large, to use contemporary and historical examples of policy and social philosophy as analogies

for what should be adopted or avoided in an ideal society. These differing styles of response

affected how I conducted the interviews as I pursued different threads in the conversations. For

example, Tea Party participants were more forthcoming when discussing current policies in

detail and responded more thoroughly when given specific hypotheticals. An example of this was

the question, "How would you deal with environmental issues which cross state and local

boundaries," which was intended to gauge how and to what extent the participant would like to

see broader state power employed. As the interview data in the next chapter shows, the

difference in style matches up with the Occupy participants' predilection for sweeping away

current social structures and institutions in favor of wholly new ones, and the Tea Party

participants' predisposition to retain and reform current institutions (even when that reform

might be significant).

Data Analysis

For each of the two cohorts, interview data was analyzed to determine what contours of

social organization were common among the group's members. These consensus items were

then compared across groups to determine areas of commonality between the Tea Party and

Occupy participants. Next I examined areas of discordance within each cohort and compare

levels of in-group discordance between groups, yielding a picture of the degree of homogeneity

or heterogeneity of ideas for social organization for each cohort. I then examined the major

areas of discord between each group – e.g., ideas of social organization which are either mutually

exclusive or otherwise antagonistic. The scope of this study limits the applicability of this

analyses when applied to the broader Occupy and Tea Party. Yet the results are not without

value as they represent the views of actual members of these movements and therefore can offer insight to what at least a portion of the population of these movements believes.

An important aspect of the study of human culture is the goal of understanding social structures that arise out of the interaction between individuals and communities and between communities and successive levels of state power (where such power exists). The Tea Party and Occupy movements are contemporary examples of overt, organized action against the status quo which have gained traction in the current cultural milieu. The scope of this project did not permit a thorough analysis of the effect or lack thereof of each movement with regard to each movement's goals for social change. However, the data collected on the visions of an "ideal society" held by participants in this study combined with a comparative analysis of that data contributes to a deeper understanding of the Tea Party and Occupy specifically and protests against structures of power generally.

Limitations

Though a tremendous amount of time and effort was put into this project, there were significant constraints on the design of the study and the broader applicability of the results. Due to limitations in time and funding, the sample size was small. Rather than conducting shorter interviews with more participants, I chose to conduct longer interviews following the theory that the resulting data would be more in-depth. A larger sample size in a subsequent, similar study would be required to ensure a more thoroughly representative set of data.

My samples were geographically localized. All Occupy participants were local to the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Tea Party participants were primarily local to Washington, DC, with two additional interviews from Pennsylvania and one from North Carolina. Therefore

this study should not be generalized to Tea Party and Occupy members from elsewhere in the United States or around the world. However, though the sample sizes for each group restricts the applicability of the views presented by participants to the broader Occupy and Tea Party movements, the relative consistency between participant responses indicates that the conclusions I present merit further investigation.

Ideally, in addition to a larger sample size incorporating a broader geographic scope, this study would have been conducted using a truly randomized sample. However, this was impractical for a number of reasons in addition to the limitations mentioned above. In order to perform a truly random sample, I would need both an accurate accounting of the population size of each group (whether locally or for the U.S.) and a good understanding of their proportional makeup. The statistics concerning both the Tea Party and Occupy movements are difficult to pin down. As noted in the literature review, there is significant data to indicate the rough proportions of gender and racial make-up of each group, but accurate estimates of population size and distribution are lacking. Data that is available indicates that the demographics of my sample population for the Tea Party and Occupy movements align closely with what is known for each group.[5] It is important to note, however, that my sample was limited in distribution to the availability of members of each group willing to speak on the record. More significantly, a random sample would require access to a massive database of contacts within each group from which to form a cohort – I had no such access.

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[5]   Zeskind states that 91.4% of Tea Party members are white, 63.9% are middle or upper-middle-class, and older than the general population (2012:498), matching closely the demographics of the Tea Party participants that participated in this study. Zeskind did not provide data on gender distribution.
        Hector R. Cordero-Guzman states that 81.3% of Occupy members are white, 7.7% Hispanic, 2.9% "mixed" race, and 1.3% black. Cordero-Guzman found the gender distribution to be 67.1% male and 30.9% female (Cordero-Guzman 2011). These statistics do not precisely match the demographics of my sample but do somewhat approximate them.

Another issue common to this type of study is the issue of self-selection bias. By the nature of the project's scope and the method of recruitment, there is the potential (indeed, likelihood) that my results are favoring those inclined to speak with me and omitting those not so inclined. For background, the majority of my solicitations produced one of the following three results: 1) no response, 2) a polite declination, or 3) an agreement to participate. It must be considered that those who did not respond or declined to participate might hold differing views which are not accounted for in my analysis.

Finally, the heterogeneous structure of both of these groups introduces complications when attempting to discuss their broader philosophies coherently. Because members of the Tea Party and Occupy movements are made up of large numbers of independently operated, locally-formed groups (themselves constituted by members of varying backgrounds and philosophies), forming generalizations about either movement is problematic at best.

INTERVIEW DATA

In this section I provide the data I collected from interviews with members of the Tea Party and Occupy, and discuss cross-group comparisons and in-group heterogeneity. I focus on key points made by each interviewee regarding their perspective on the nature and structure of an ideal society, problems with the current paradigm of social organization, and their views on how to make progress towards an ideal society.

For a brief comparative exercise I provide the following quotations pulled out of context from the interviews with both groups. The intention here is to demonstrate the potential difficulty in ascribing specific views to either the Occupy or Tea Party participants. These quotations are presented in their full contexts in my review of the data collected for each participant (below).

- "What I think about government is that it should be what it says in the constitution: We the People. And I am the government not just because I work for them but because I am a citizen. It's our government. And we need to fix it, and reclaim it, and take it back."

- "Education – I think it's gotta change. Universities are way too expensive. Why it should cost anything is amazing to me."

- You'll find that the conservation and sustainability aspect would kind of evolve from putting the power back in at the local level.

- "Education shouldn't be what the state mandates, it should be what the community decides it wants to teach."

- "The decisions need to be made at the grassroots and community level. Its empowering people to have control over their own lives. Not having someone far away making a decision for them."

- "I have no say at all in the federal government in our representatives or the Senate because I don't have enough money."

- "The reason [the other side] gets what they want is because they focus on an issue, they go after it, and they win. Whereas us, on [this side], we're more individual, more creative, we're this, we're that. And we say, okay, what happened?!"

- "There's two ways to have power in my opinion. One is by money, the other is by flesh and blood."

Occupy Interviews

Matteo

I met Matteo, 25, at his modestly appointed row house in central Washington, DC, which he rents with other members of the OccupyDC movement. He welcomed me into his home and offered me a ginger ale, which I accepted. He explained to me that he was excited to talk about his work with Occupy and ideas for the future. Matteo is not only an active participant in the OccupyDC movement, but works on projects not directly associated with Occupy that are intended to demonstrate by example how to transition from a society based on capitalism to one that he views as more egalitarian and focused on fostering "communal determination."

One of these projects consists of growing and selling sprouts to cover costs of living and other projects. Another is his participation in the D.C. Learning Collective as a volunteer teacher. Matteo described this program as "a group that works to liberate people's minds, maybe not necessarily in the way that people may think what that means, I mean being able to assess, to critique, being able to contemplate things without certain structures necessarily being in place."

I began the interview with Matteo by asking him how he would envision the "ideal society." He paused for moment of thought and then responded that he thought it an impossible question to answer conclusively because "it's almost impossible to envision a post-capitalist world." Matteo does not believe that a post-capitalist world is unthinkable, but rather that the current society is so affected by capitalism as to preclude a clear vision of how life without capitalism would operate. "Few people really know what that would look like because there are a lot of elements that are attached to [a post-capitalist society]."

Though Matteo was hesitant to offer a clear outline of an ideal society, I asked him to suggest some core components of what an ideal society, in his view, would include. He promptly responded that a major goal would be "the end of exploitation of people through their labor" and that this would require a "decentralized decision making process." He stressed that, in his view, the exploitation of people affected their self-identity in negative ways, stating that "[we need to] get rid of this idea of growth being a key element in our way of life, not just in terms of our economy but in terms of how we see ourselves." Therefore an ideal society from Matteo's perspective would prohibit pursuit of economic growth, and the contingent exploitation of individuals' labor.

During our conversation, Matteo suggested that the Occupy movement has had a measurable effect on challenging a number of people's passive acceptance of the political process: "I think a great portion of the population sense that something is amiss." Matteo noted that while Occupy is not the first group to coalesce around the idea that the current paradigm of social organization was inadequate for the needs of the greater population, it has built upon what other groups have accomplished. He discussed the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s as well as the anti-globalization movements of the late 1990s. Where Occupy has been more successful, according to Matteo, is in its focus on decentralization and a direct-democracy method of decision making. He said that "people are realizing that they have the ability as part of a community or part of a group to determine their outcome – to make decisions that affect their lives, rather than voting on someone and relying on them to make the decisions for them." Matteo confirmed that this style of self-determination would be a necessary component of an ideal society.

I wanted to get more details on Matteo's opinion of individualism versus collectivism with regard to self-determination. He responded that the obsession with the notion of individualism was inherent to capitalism and is currently contributing the break-down of society. He said, "You know, when you have people that think it's them versus everyone else, you can't hold together groups of people like that." Thus, to Matteo, it is necessary to promote conditions which foster group cohesion in order to have a society which can be called successful. He states that "to have people operate by themselves, without the need of other people is just a very ugly world and I don't want the world to be like that."

So I asked Matteo if people cannot in a practical sense operate by themselves separate from their community, is there then value in using state power as a force for cohesion in an ideal society? Matteo bristled at the suggestion and responded that "that the state as a societal construct, as a bureaucracy essentially, has never been in the favor of the people. Communities have always been fraught with the dangers of dealing with the state and how impersonal it can be." He continues:

> No matter what, [the state] is always going to get in the way of people acting in a collective nature to be mutually supportive of one another…It's the state acting as a dominating force – and that right there is a key element of the new world is that domination should no longer be at all existent. It can't exist in the next world.

Our conversation repeatedly circled back to the idea of the elimination of domination or exploitation as the key to a better society. I asked Matteo to explain how he envisioned such a community would emerge from the current paradigm. He suggested that a lack of personal community engagement was the problem and that when people are in close contact and "see each other on a day to day basis" that bonds inevitably form. Once these bonds achieve a certain threshold, according to Matteo, the state bureaucracy becomes unnecessary. At this stage, "mutual aid becomes very important – if you have someone who has become destitute because of

some natural phenomenon, a volcano or tornado, whatever it may be, then it becomes almost the duty of other people who are in a better position than that person to help that person."

Considering his perception of the current problems of state power, lack of community engagement, and prevalence of the "myth of individualism," I asked Matteo what steps he would take to begin realizing his ideal society. He talked about the projects and programs he is currently involved in and how he and others feel that these activities are providing a concrete example of how a better society can operate. Matteo also suggested a multi-pronged strategy which includes "setting up the foundations for new institutions…downgrading the importance of our current institutions," and "creating new cultural narratives and images that people can have to hold for this transformation into what would be this new world. It's just a matter of how well and strategic and planned people can be."

John

I made my way to John's house via roads that wind through a portion of Maryland which is transitioning from farmland to high-end communities. This area is not a dense suburb filled with cookie-cutter housing developments - the population density is low and the houses large and differentiated. My GPS guided me down John's road but I could not immediately locate his house. I phoned him to get better directions and he explained that the driveway was long and his house not easily visible from the cul-de-sac. After directing me to a parking spot, he invited me into a grand house thick with exposed wood framing and a rustic décor. He offered me a glass of his home-made wine, which I accepted, and explained his participation in the Occupy movement.

John, 63, was most active with the labor committee within OccupyDC where he drew from his experience as a career U.S. government employee and as a Ph.D. in economics. Despite

his affiliation with the Occupy movement and shared conceptions of what is wrong with the current structure of society, John stated immediately that he had a number of fundamental disagreements with the general Occupy movement regarding strategies for achieving a more perfect society. John not only believed in the validity of centralized state power (contrary to most other Occupy participants interviewed for this study) but also made clear that he could not envision the structure for an ideal society because such a structure would have to be arrived at incrementally and through experimentation. He described his subscription to the philosophies espoused by John Dewey, Thorstein Veblen, Clarence Ayres, and E.F. Schumacher, as well as Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal program of social safety nets. He said that "the hallmark of those folks is that you don't have any set solutions to any problem. What you need to do is look at the specific problem and you start to design solutions."

I asked John how this contrasted with others he interacted with in the Occupy community. He responded that too many members of the movement "have the answers" and did not appreciate the value of being "evolutionary over revolutionary." As an example, John cited the members of Occupy who are also members of the Progressive Labor Party (PLP): "If you go on their website they have all their answers laid out, they want a classless society, they want no wages, they want a dictatorship, and stuff like that. And they would say that's the solution, and I'd say, 'Well how do you know that?'" Instead, John suggests that what is required to improve society are a series of prerequisites which, once achieved, will allow for a more perfect society based on democracy to emerge. He asserts that "in order for democracy to break out we have to have an educated population that can think critically about what the issues are and not be spoon fed what the issues are."

I took note of John's phrase "in order for democracy to break out" – clearly one of the problems with current society for John is his perception of a lack of a truly representative democracy constituted of and by a "population that can think critically." I asked John to elaborate on this point:

> I'd go back to John Dewey's book The Public and its Problems in which he said that you need an educated population before you can have a democracy. We don't educate people in this country – at best we train them. And by education I mean teach them to define what the problems are, don't just take it from somebody else what the problem is.

I asked John to expand on what he sees as currently inadequate with regard to education in the United States, and what changes would be needed to fulfill the prerequisite of an "educated population." He suggested that the key is to teach "critical thinking" and that inherent to being able to think critically is the ability to have access to negative feedback. He explained that, "many places I've worked, for example, bosses don't want to know what's going wrong, they just want to know the good stuff. Well, in order for a system to save itself you've gotta have negative feedback, you've gotta know what's going wrong." I asked John what happens in a society where negative feedback is downplayed or ignored and he responded that "it is through criticism that you can grow and learn. Otherwise we just sit around holding each other's hands smiling at each other, and nothing's going to get done."

John explained that a lot of the frustration which led him to participate in Occupy stemmed from witnessing a substantial shift in power from the broader population to a small cadre of wealthy and powerful people. For John, a population lacking in critical thinking skills has contributed to this shifting of social power from the people to the wealthy by an increasing complacency among the citizens of the United States.

John suggested that we "need to go back and revisit this little experiment of capitalism that we've tried, it's clearly a failure in many ways, and we need to start taking it apart to find out where the failures are." I asked if he had examples of these failures and he swiftly responded "money in politics has led to a very corrupt system. Our politicians are bought." According to John, the capitalist system has created the conditions that transfer the power that should lie in the hands of the politicians who are elected represent the views of their constituents to those who possess wealth and use that wealth to influence politicians.

I asked John to elaborate on how this system of wealth-as-power is maintained if it is so disadvantageous to the general public, and he blamed the persistence of the "Horatio Alger idea that you did it by yourself."[6] John noted that he taught at a prominent university for over twenty years and that he was frequently confronted with students who believed "'I did this all by myself; I didn't get help from anybody!'" John was animated and agitated by this recollection – "I mean, just look around," he said, waving his arms, "the whole infrastructure that you've been living and breathing with was given to you by society. You built on the shoulders of giants."

John described the importance of values as a foundational lattice upon which society is structured. To change the direction of society, according to John, you have to change the values that are held in high regard by the population which makes up that society. In addition to the negative effect of the Horatio Alger-style "rugged individual" value he noted above, he described his distaste for the common belief that "if you make money, you earned it." He continued:

> Well, you have to think about that. All societies have to find a way to divide up the economic pie, and they do that by making up bullshit stories. Our bullshit story is the factors of production. Land, labor, capital, and entrepreneurs are productive therefore we should take our product, our money, and give it back to those factors of production. Marxists say its labor. But they're all stories. The fact is that there are many factors of production besides that. There's

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6   Horatio Alger, Jr. was a 19th century American author whose novels promoted ideas of individualism, self-sufficiency, and the theory that hard work is rewarded by monetary and social success.

immigration, discrimination, there's technology, which is skills and the ability to use them, all of which is a social stock that came from generations.

Ultimately, according to John's theory, a population educated in critical thinking will be less susceptible to adhering without consideration to these "bullshit stories" which define and shape society, and will be better able to discover and come up with solutions to problems which negatively affect the greater society. John described him perspective by saying he's "an evolutionary, I'm not a revolutionary. I think revolutions replace one set of bums with another set of bums."

I commented that many of the Occupy participants I spoke with advocate, or at least sympathize with, the concept of revolutionary change – and that some firmly believe that incremental reform only serves to entrench the prevailing system (see Steve, this chapter). John replied, "I can look at Marxism, at their dialectical materialism, the labor theory of value, class struggle and all those things argue for a solution – they need to be put in charge, that's the solution. I don't have anything like that, and I'm suspicious of someone who does." So I asked John, beyond the fear of replacing "one set of bums with another set of bums," what is problematic with the Marxist revolution model of pursuing a society which is more equitable for its population? He responded that "they say we need a wageless society and this is what it would look like – they don't know that, it's pure speculation." Instead, John returned to his point about being "an experimentalist" – that is, the way to a better society is to isolate problems, suggest solutions, and implement those solutions. If they don't work or make things worse, according to John, you start over and try again. He suggested that "it's like dropping a stone in the water and looking at the ripples – that's how you decide what's good or bad, not whether or not it forwards the cause of the revolution."

For John, there is no concept of an ideal society because his focus is not on what society should look like but rather what processes are likely to lead to the best outcome. He said, "In my view there isn't a way that this is supposed to turn out, but that we're supposed to discover this." So I asked John to elaborate on those processes and how they should be implemented. He responded, "Well I think that underlying the power structure are people's attitudes, values, and beliefs. And while you can change their attitudes and beliefs pretty quickly, it might take generations to change their values." John provided some examples of problematic versus positive values:

> You gotta put it in people's values that this is what is important to be a citizen. The whole idea of freedom is sort of a joke in this country. Freedom to [the Tea Party] is when you go into a Burger King you can have any kind of hamburger you want – and freedom has been defined as the absence of coercion. When in fact if you pull up to an intersection with a stop light there – that doesn't limit your freedom, that stop light. That enables your freedom. Regulations further freedom.

John asserted that the concept of "freedom" is an important component of a better society, however he questioned how freedom is defined. For John, freedom is not simply the "absence of coercion," a perspective he ascribes to members of the Tea Party specifically and U.S. citizens more generally, but instead is a complex and nuanced attribute of living that is negotiated on a continuous basis by members of the community. He said, "…the government is our collective decision of what we need to do. Government does a lot of things that I don't approve of, there's wars that I don't approve of, but I'm in it just the same because it's a collective decision of what we're going to do."

So if John accepts the idea of collective decision making and the fact that the collective will at times make decisions he disagrees with, what does he think needs to be different in order to improve society? What, ultimately, led him to participate in the Occupy movement? He said:

What I think about government is that it should be what it says in the constitution: We the People. And I am the government not just because I work for them but because I am a citizen. It's our government. And we need to fix it, and reclaim it, and take it back.

Mickey

Like, Matteo, Mickey, 24, lives in a modest but comfortable row house in Washington, DC along with other members of OccupyDC. As I entered I was directed to a soft couch and handed a cold beer, and Mickey began describing how he became involved in the Occupy movement. He explained that he was heavily influenced by his father, who participated in a number of social movements and identified as "an old liberal hippy." Mickey came to Washington, DC from Florida after learning about the original Occupy Wall Street protests in New York City. He had hoped to get involved locally in Florida but could not find an active organization near him. Initially, Mickey had considered joining the protesters at Zuccotti in New York City, but the tide appeared to be turning against that occupation. He learned that the OccupyDC movement was just getting started and so made his way to Washington to join the nascent protests there.

I began the interview asking him how he would organize his ideal society. He responded that from his perspective an ideal society would be one "primarily based around the idea of mutual aid. It's a society that takes care of everyone and everyone is provided for. Everyone has a comfortable life, one that's not driven by profit and greed. I mean, definitely anti-capitalist." The concept of mutual aid is common among the Occupy participants I interviewed, but Micky was the only one to mention it as a key organizing principle right at the top of the interview. Throughout the interview Mickey returned to the idea that the priority in his "ideal society" would be to ensure that people understood the value of helping others. He stressed that there was

no requirement to insist everyone agree – just that they understood the idea that even a small number of people suffering can have a negative effect on the quality of life of everyone else in society. He said, "It's the idea of making sure that everyone is cared for." Mickey went on to cite statistics which indicate to him that there exists within the United States more than enough wealth to take care of the basic needs of its citizens.

Mickey stated explicitly that a core goal for an ideal society would be to ensure fairness. He said, "Equality – everyone is equal – or treated fairly is a better way to put it. Treating everyone as equal, you can find yourself ignoring people's backgrounds and identities. Not making things equal but making things fair." From his perspective, it is important to ensure that people are not suffering needlessly – food, wealth, and other products and services can easily be redistributed from those who have an excess to those in desperate need. Yet prevailing models of redistribution in the United States and elsewhere require a strong, centralized state apparatus, which Mickey's anarchist side is suspicious of. Mickey noted that traditional socialist theory calls for a temporary state structure which would melt away once fairness has been achieved, but that "if there is going to be any kind of state structure then there will be inherent hierarchy and then domination that comes naturally from that kind of system." For Mickey, any state structure is worrisome, even if intended to be temporary. Ultimately, according to Mickey, "It's about having a society free of oppression."

I asked Mickey to talk more about what types of oppression he views as important to eliminate from an ideal society, and how the people constituting that society might be able to accomplish this. He responded that "Racism, sexism, issues around gender normality, like queer rights, are some of the biggest ones I see as far as oppression issues go." Mickey then described how he initially did not have a full understanding of the significance of oppression:

Anti-oppression is of course a very complicated subject, you are always learning more about what is going on out there. Living in the camps you talk to people, you talk to a lot of people…you talk to each other and it's a lot of the same story from each camp, a lot of similar themes going on, and one, especially in DC, was not having a strong anti-oppression focus. And I myself was at fault for that because when I came up here…I really had no idea what I was doing.

So Mickey was passionate about joining the movement, but his views have transformed through the act of participation in Occupy. His perspective has expanded to include a focus on anti-oppression as a key goal for improving society, and a core requirement of an ideal society. Mickey noted that there was, at least initially, a lack of an anti-oppression focus in the greater Occupy movement.

I asked Mickey to elaborate on the process of consensus in the Occupy movement and he described how "It's very hard to organize people from a whole melting pot of different backgrounds." He cited the student protests in Montreal in May of 2012 and how there was, from his perspective, greater cohesion among the participants of those protests than in the Occupy movement camps he visited. Mickey described how "[the Montreal protestors] all were approaching it from an understanding that even if their point of view isn't the one the group goes with that the group is there for the benefit of the whole." Regarding Occupy, however, "the problem we started to have here is that people with different perspectives – if you don't do what they want you to do then you are like marginalizing them and minimizing them. They'll start saying you're pushing me out, you're not listening to me." This attitude, according to Mickey, made achieving consensus more difficult.

So the question remained, what system can help achieve a society free of state oppression yet remain considerate of different opinions and ways of living? Mickey responded that "[One of the] values important to an ideal society is the idea of direct democracy. Empowering people to have decisions in their own community about what goes on. We don't need these giant state

structures." He acknowledged that direct democracy "can be a messy process" and that it is not always the most efficient process for making decisions. He stressed, however, that it was, in his view, the most fair. He also suggested that direct democracy promotes face-to-face discussion and interaction, which enhances community involvement and cohesion. I asked Mickey if he could provide more concrete examples of how direct democracy could be implemented in a country as large as the United States. He suggested modeling the greater society on the spokes-council model employed by many Occupy groups. Local communities would determine their positions on a topic and send a spokesperson to a regional general assembly. That assembly of representatives would then debate and vote on that topic. The representatives would be carrying the opinions agreed on by the communities, not their own opinions, and they would only serve once which would nullify entrenchment of power.

Mickey is patterning the future ideal society directly off the structures used within the Occupy movement. He said that "We are trying to create the world we'd want to see. It can work – and it needs to. The decisions need to be made at the grassroots and community level. Its empowering people to have control over their own lives. Not having someone far away making a decision for them." Contrary to John's suggestion that the Marxist-influenced Occupy members "have all the answers," Mickey asserted that "we don't have all the answers, but I feel like when we have a post-capitalist revolutionary society we will all be able to make those decisions together in a democratic way." He also stressed that he had no illusions about the ease of this transition, citing experience during the Occupy encampments: "You have to trust the process to an extent – it's not always going to be pretty or easy. Our general assemblies in the park started out great and then there were definitely some really hard ones."

We spoke for a time about some of the problems he observed at later general assemblies, but Mickey ultimately believed that these were learning experiences. The key, according to Mickey, was to take those lessons learned and include them in a project designed to educate the public about what is wrong with society currently and how it can be improved. For Mickey, "Education is the key to everything. That is the key. You have to educate people. And it's hard because we have people, even ourselves, who have already gone through the most important times of our lives in the society that we have now and we're affected by that." Thus one problem to overcome, from Mickey's perspective, is the indoctrination of members of society. Therefore, the revolution will occur on a generational time scale. Mickey concludes that:

> Some of the old crotchety stubborn people who refuse to give in to anything that's radical and new, they will naturally die off – I'm not advocating like, "Yes I can't wait for you to die!" – but you start reeducating the people…when we start raising a generation of people in this perspective, mutual aid and equality and anti-oppression and all this – when that's their norm then you do that for a few generations and then you have it ideally.

Felix

As I was finishing up my interview with Mickey one of his roommates, Felix, walked in the door. Felix was himself a member of Occupy, and had met Ricky through the movement. I explained why I was there and Felix enthusiastically agreed to sit down to an interview – and to leave the room while I finished the interview with Mickey. Felix is 29 years old, and came to Washington, DC from Richmond, Virginia.

I asked Felix to describe his ideal society. He responded that "Generally, I would like a non-oppressive society that is organized by like-minded people that choose to indentify together as a community…a society where everyone's opinion is equally valued an none are oppressed." His focus on non-oppression is similar to his roommate Mickey (whose interview he was not

present for). He explained that his conception of an ideal society would be one that is "heavy on consent and dialogue, where any kind of laws and governance is facilitated by neutral parties who don't have a way to exert will over the conversation." Additionally, he suggested that such a society would require that "an apparatus is in place to work with other communities, should that be necessary."

Felix referred to laws and governance - and his mention of an "apparatus" suggested a form of state structure. Did this mean he was in favor of an institutionalized form of government? Felix explained that, while a traditional "anarcho-syndicalist would say 'no, that's just a conversation'…that in and of itself is a form of government." He continues:

> But it would be a government where no one can get into power and keep getting elected and re-elected. Where money isn't the driving force of who is actually making the decisions. Many people would be making the decisions and those many people would not be there more than a year at a time, or six months at a time. They could only be there one time ever. Some sort of revolving, participatory direct democracy.

I asked Felix to provide more details as to the structure of this "revolving, participatory direct democracy" and he responded that it starts with the local community: "The first thing we'd try to figure out is how to we eat? We'd get together, everyone would have their say, a facilitated discussion, we'd figure out together how we're going to get food, what we're going to do with it when we get it and we consent on that." I asked Felix if this would be a purely local form of governance or would it apply nationally? Felix describes how local communities would elect representatives that would participate in regional or national bodies that would discuss issues and vote on policies. He said that "At the most basic level it's a discussion where you talk and discuss until you have a consensus that people can live with."

I asked Felix whether this would work only in the context of like-minded communities, or if it would allow for a variety of styles of community interacting via the regional bodies.

48

Without hesitation he suggested that this model of organization would allow for disparate groups to interact peacefully. He said, "Obviously the Tea Party and Occupy are never going to see eye-to-eye on everything, but a structure like that would allow people who want to live in those patriarchal, gun-toting societies to have their community as well." Felix continued by explaining how, in his view, these disparate communities would interact: "it would be based on mutual respect, they would not bring guns into our community and we would not try to dominate their community." The key for this to work is cultivating a "structure where you accept others and accept that they don't agree with you, or they might disagree with you, but there's not an oppressive order kind of placed on you by disagreeing."

As I came to understand the popularity of decentralized authority among both Occupy and Tea Party participants I became curious about how these proposed societies would approach projects that cross over communities borders (examples include environmental policy and national defense). I asked Felix if he thought that these types of projects could be as effective if handled at the community level instead of by a centralized state authority. He suggested that these projects would be better handled by communities working together and said that "I think if you put the power back into people and local community councils and we're looking out for each other, I think you'll find that there's going to be a lot less people wanting to frack in their backyards… You'll find that the conservation and sustainability aspect would kind of evolve from putting the power back in at the local level."

I ask Felix if it is fair to describe his position as asserting that the aggregation of local concerns results in the best outcome for the greater society. Felix responded, "I think that's where we've gotten away from the original idea – this was a representative democracy, but each congressman eventually represented more and more people so those voices got lost. The

responsibility to do good for your neighbors got lost." Here again the concept of mutual aid is paramount. Felix explained that in his vision for an ideal society, "People that want to help people will help people."

I asked Felix to elaborate on his point about the United States getting away from the original idea behind a state based on representative democracy. "Once the people don't see a direct input in the way that their food is brought in, the way that they are defended, the way they are educated – once their opinion is drowned out then there's no legitimacy left in the body or the society." So what is the best way to combat this separation between the people and those that ostensibly represent them in government? Felix stated emphatically that "At every step hierarchy should be challenged. Especially in modern society hierarchy is not so much earned as it is kind of birthed, or given, depending on where you're born and who you're born to." He went on to use a metaphor to at least partially explain the problems in current society: "So of course you have to get human to an understanding of – what do they say in baseball or football? You're only as strong as your weakest link. That's where we should be thinking as a society – unfortunately we only apply that to our games and our leisure time." Felix continues: "In an ideal society, people would govern that way. It's about getting back to our humanity. That's what allowed us to evolve as we did and get to the top of the food chain, so to speak, our ability to look out for each other."

I concluded the interview by asking Felix what steps need to be taken to lay the foundation for the ideal society he described. He responded:

> Resistance through education. Teach people the things we can do to empower our communities and get our people back. Education shouldn't be what the state mandates, it should be what the community decides it wants to teach. Start putting operatives in the public schools, elected to school boards, who are there to tell the truth and empower people. Get inside, however you can and kind of implode it, and then create the alternative model.

Karen

Karen, 20, was very busy with her undergraduate coursework and a number of extra-curricular activities, but was able to meet with me on the campus of American University to discuss her participation in OccupyDC and her ideas for how to structure and ideal society. All the other Occupy participants in this study classified themselves as white males who only mildly identified with their ethnic identity. Karen, on the other hand, described herself as "black and Mexican" who strongly identified with her ethnic identity. Our discussion revealed that she attributes much of her current philosophy to the influence of her heritage and her position outside of the white male heteronormative hegemony.

After explaining my project, I asked Karen how she would organize her ideal society. She responded, "I believe in starting completely over – I think that things are too, excuse my language, fucked up to do anything with what we have now." Karen's opening statement indicated that, unlike John, she does not subscribe to an evolutionary transition or the retention of specific institutions of current society.

She continues, explaining what she sees as a necessary foundation for an ideal society: "I'm Mexican so I have a family that's really based on community. Back home you work with one another and you go out into the farms and you work with the chickens – so for me the biggest thing would be to have a huge community approach." Karen provides an example, saying, "If you're raising a child it would be like the idea that it takes a village – literally raising a child not just with your own values but with the values of others in the community you are living in." For Karen, community is not about like-minded people choosing to live together, but about people living together accepting each other despite potential differences.

I asked Karen what would be important to teach children beyond family and community values. She responded that "Schooling would all be done out of the community – and as funny as it sounds because I am in a university, universities and private institutions wouldn't exist, and we wouldn't necessarily be learning strictly math and science – it would be how to connect with the Earth and how to listen to your body." Karen does not dismiss the concept of learning things like math and science, but stresses that in her ideal society education would be governed by the needs and desires of the community. Her proposal to abolish universities indicates that centralized and state-mandated programs of education would not be beneficial to the maintenance of an ideal society. Karen states explicitly that the knowledge currently taught in these institutions are, in her view, insufficient. Instead, education should consistent of teaching "things we haven't necessarily been taught to think are important in school but things that are important because it's about you learning about yourself but also connecting with other people."

I asked Karen to elaborate on the importance of education as a means to achieving a better society. She responded, "Probably changing the way that our education system works is the main thing because we spend so much of our time and such a large portion of our lives in schooling. That shapes who we are, what we think." So I asked if she thinks that the current education system is less about learning and more about indoctrination? "Oh absolutely, absolutely. Before I got to university I think I was very much focused on legislative change, and putting my faith into politicians. Working with the system. That was in large part because of my school – elementary, and middle school – it was taught to me that this is what you do and a lot of the changes that have occurred are through that process." I suggest that she was taught to be a "good citizen" and she replied "Right, and had made me very passive in the way I approach a lot

of situations." So for Karen a major impediment to positive social change is the current structure of the education system.

Our conversation shifted to whether or not there was a role for government in this ideal society. Karen said, "It's such a hard question and something that I've been thinking about for a while. I think that local government can be effective to some extent because it's a smaller area and it allows you to connect more with a community." However, she followed up with a more anarchist suggestion, "I don't believe in the idea that if people don't have someone watching over them they won't know what to do. I don't believe in that." So while a small, locally derived governing structure may have benefits, Karen remains suspicious of any sort of structure of power that can be exerted over the wishes of the community at large. She goes on to describe in detail a real-world example from Bolivia of how state power and individual communities have worked together while maintaining autonomy:

> In Bolivia they have Plan 3000, which is these 3,000 families that are basically a coalition of families that live in Bolivia, and they run themselves…Evo Morales, the president, if you look at the things he does and the social changes he's created its all based on what the local indigenous people have wanted. He literally asked the people, especially from the Plan 3000, what they want and they demand it and he's like "Okay, this is what's going to happen." So the indigenous people of Bolivia are working together to create a more just living situation for themselves and not necessarily relying on the President to decide what he believes it right.

I asked Karen how communities in her ideal society would handle working on projects that cross local boundaries and involve a number of stakeholders with different needs and agendas. She said that there would be room in her ideal society for a "larger body to manage those types of things" but also suggested that there would not "be a need for those if we weren't so consumed by greed and fear or other things like that." I interpreted this to mean that communities working together to solve problems (and not increase profits or power) would be able to reach compromise and not require a centralized state authority to determine winners and

losers. Karen provided another example from Bolivia: "They have an Earth constitution which is used across Bolivia. It's a very simple concept – protect the Earth and take only what you need. It's a set of ideals you follow, and I'm in favor of that."

Karen is in favor of advocating universal philosophies to which individual communities can aspire but remains "uncomfortable with specific laws or bills or regulations, because then you start getting into who is regulating that." From Karen's perspective, laws and regulations are too easily manipulated by the powerful to the detriment of the weak. She cited a recent example from California, where "there is a bill to label genetically modified foods, but the companies that were pumping money towards the bill were local organic companies but then other companies like Kellogg's were putting even more money against the bill. So you look at who's funding it, who's not funding it. That I have a problem with." As she noted previously, Karen no longer has faith in the concept that laws and legislative action are sufficient to promote positive change.

I asked Karen if there were any examples of societies that exist today that could serve as a model to base her ideal society off of. She suggested that the "indigenous people of Boliva" or "even the Zapatistas" would be good examples because of their focus on community-based organization. However, she also talked about a book she read recently that posits that "one of the problems with the way that we've been trying to organize and create social change is that we are trying to look at past models or look at current models but the problem is that we need a completely new model. Looking at old ones isn't going to help."

I followed-up by asking Karen if she believes that there is a singular model that might emerge which would work for all communities? She responded, "there isn't one model – it's dependent on where you live and the type of people you are surrounded by. So there would

literally be thousands of models." As an example, Karen notes that she has a number of vegan friends who believe that everyone should go vegan. However, "in places such as Alaska where going vegan isn't necessarily possible there would need to be a different approach. So it's really dependant on where you live," and dependant on cultural traditions. These differences do not risk creating contentious system in Karen's view. Rather, she said that "What you can do is promote certain ideas like sustainability and love and peace – but approach it different ways."

I asked Karen what would be some of the first steps she would take to get to this ideal society? She responded that:

> I think for there to actually be a change there has to be a shift in our beliefs in terms of who we place our trust in. First of all one person can't change everything, so it would be silly to put all our hope in one person. If we want things to change we have to push for them. I think a lot of the time we're taught that we as a community and individuals can't make change, only certain special people who possess these special qualities can, and I think that definitely deters us from trying to make changes.

Steve

Steve, 36, is an active member in the OccupyDC movement and a member of the Progressive Labor Party (PLP). He works in IT security, which likely accounts for the spoofed email address[7] he used to get in contact with me and my initial impression that he was reluctant to discuss much online. After some back and forth over texts and email, Steve agreed to meet me in a crowded Starbuck's near Dupont Circle. We huddled over my recorder in at table in the corner where I began by explaining the purpose of my project, after which Steve appeared to become more comfortable talking with me.

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[7]   A "spoofed" email address uses a forged sender address to limit tracing back to the source. While used primarily by email spammers, many activists have begun employing this practice to hinder surveillance by governments and private organizations which might target them.

Before I could ask my opening question, Steve started describing the problems he sees in current U.S. society. "If you're not in the ruling class you're not getting anywhere. Some people might have a nicer life, but overall most people have really fucking shitty lives," he said. "It sucks. I work. I work again. I'm working two or three jobs just support the kids. And it doesn't always work out." So for Steve, the balance of work and living that most people in the U.S. currently endure is incompatible with having a life that is not "shitty." He continued, "You have mothers and fathers who are single parents, and they have to pay for daycare – all of these expenses that pile up and they work 60 hours a week to make sure everything is good for their child but at the same time the child's lacking that relationship that's really necessary if you're going to succeed." Steve was visibly angry describing this paradox he perceives between affording to care for children while not being present to provide that care.

I asked Steve if he thought an ideal society was achievable and, if so, how he envisions it would operate. He responded emphatically, "Absolutely it's achievable – the first thing you'd have the society be is a non-profit based society. So you'd have things like education, training, whatever you want to do. Everybody would contribute to that society as a whole." Steve elaborated on how people would contribute: "Everyone would contribute willingly and be dedicated to make things better not just for themselves as an individual but to their community and the world at large." The ultimate criteria for this ideal society would be that people would have their basic needs covered. Steve said, "Everybody would work. Everybody would have a house to live in. Everyone would have food on their plate."

I asked Steve how people would be organized to achieve this goal. He suggested that "Ideally you have people doing what they'd like to do – I mean, there's enough people out there, from everything to the hardest jobs to the jobs that require a high intellectual capacity." He

continued by promoting, like John, the idea of teaching critical thinking as a foundation for a more equal society: "If everyone is educated from the beginning to think analytically and critically, there wouldn't be this massive gap of income disparity. People would be doctors strictly because they want to help people. People would be waste collectors or work in public works because they want to see the city clean." Steve also stressed that he views judging the relative value of jobs based on current social strata is nonsensical. He said, "Both of those roles [doctor and waste collector] play a vital function – you can't have one and not the other."

Steve continued elaborating on the details of how daily life might proceed in this ideal society, suggesting that "If a society requires that everyone works for 20 hours a week – that's either 4 days a week at 5 hours a day, or 5 days a week at 4 hours a day. Now that leaves so much room for everything else. You can be creative, you can do your own projects." Steve also returned to the concept of the value of maintaining a relationship with your family and community: "You want to spend time with your family, you can get to know your neighbors. That's the community strengthening, and that way people can actually have good relationships with their parents so they don't feel like they are being abandoned all the time."

I asked Steve to describe what steps would be required to get to the ideal society he envisions. His first suggestion was to teach people "that everything that is put into society that's productive is the same in terms of everything else." Steve asserted that "It's not something that just comes naturally because in the capitalist society we're taught that the individual is the most important thing and we're taught to do whatever it takes to get ahead, even if it is at the cost of somebody else's quality of life. That's wrong."

I asked Steve whether an institutionalized state structure would be required to implement his ideas. He cited Marx, saying, "First you have a party, and you have a state for a while, but

you want to dissolve those over time. They are necessary for the immediate structure." Steve

went on to explain that the structure was needed during the transitionary phase to lay the

foundation for a future decentralized form of community. I asked Steve how he would get from

the current social paradigm to the transitionary phase he described. He said, "You have to build

a mass organization. You need like a couple million people – at the very least 10 percent of the

population that is actually committed." Steve continued, describing some of the tactics for mass

organization promoted by the PLP, "We need everyone to have the confidence to stand up and

have strong unions – like in DC, if the transit workers decided not to work and go on strike one

day, the government is shut down…You think of all the industries that make the country work –

if you can bring those to a grinding halt with the intention of not just getting a better wage but

making things better for everyone overall."

Steve's call for mass organization was different from the focus on decentralized action

espoused by other Occupy participants interviewed for this study. For Steve, some amount of

hierarchy was beneficial for making coordinated moves against specific targets of power in the

current social paradigm. Furthermore, Steve perceives gradual or evolutionary reform in an

extremely negative light. He said, "Reform is the bane of revolution!...If people gain what they

want, like if they have a strike or a demonstration and they get what they want or a portion of

what they want, they become docile! It's a tactic those in power knows works. 'Here's a couple

crumbs, we'll take that back from you later.'"

We discussed at length the topic of requirements for inclusion in the ideal society, and in

the specific communities that society would be composed of. The question seemed to intrigue

Steve and he came at it from a few different perspectives: "I guess it would depend on the actual

person and the actual community. Because you have a whole bunch of various factors there –

you have people who are potential harm, or people who would be a benefit somewhere else."

He continued, "What can they contribute? If someone is really good at talking to people and

being therapeutic with them, If the community already has someone who can meet the

community's need, the new person can move to another community that lacks that type of

person." His focus was on the practical use of the individual to the community, but after some

thought he then retreated slightly from that position, saying "I think people should be able to

move pretty much anywhere they want. One of the key things is that we're struggling with is the

ideology, either the one we're trying to get rid of or the one we're trying to have succeed. And

so if you have someone who was a Nazi, hell no! They can't move into the community."

I asked Steve if the requirement could be stated as a willingness to submit to the ideology

or philosophy of the community. He responded, "Yes, within a given set of parameters. I mean,

there are all sorts of communities that form – people have different ways of interacting with each

other. You go to a different neighborhood and people act differently. I went to Eugene

[Oregon], and was like 'What's going on here? What's wrong with these people?'" We both

laughed at his comment, and he continued, saying, "I mean, I would never let a racist move into

my neighborhood – if someone was associated with the KKK or the Nazis, they would be

leaving pretty soon after they moved in." Ultimately, Steve suggested that questions like

requirements for acceptance in a community are "micro level issue[s] – the micro things are not

something that any one person can answer. When you talk about idealistic situations, its best to

look at them from a macro level."

Before we concluded the interview Steve circled around to his initial comments about

what was wrong with the current social paradigm. "Capitalists are not going to give up their

power. The root problem is capitalism. The root problem is money, profit. If you're in a society that is driven by a profit based system you're going to have problems. Someone will be suffering because of someone else."

Summary of Occupy Interviews

All the Occupy participants interviewed had in common the idea that their ideal society would be based upon the notion of increased power and participation of the citizenry, though they provided varying degrees of specificity regarding policies to promote these goals. Matteo, Felix, Mickey, and Karen spoke in more abstract terms about the importance of eliminating centralized state power in order to allow communities to control their destinies. These four participants also highlighted the importance of education as a means for attaining and maintaining a society based on community involvement.

John and Steve provided more specific but divergent views on how to forge a better society. John believed it impossible to envision an ideal society, favoring "evolution" over "revolution" and focusing instead on promoting processes (including the teaching of critical thinking and the changing of values) that would incrementally improve the social order. Steve, on the other hand, promoted Marxist-style revolution (with labor protests being a key component) leading to a temporary central state structure which would then wither as local communities began to take charge of their own affairs.

Each Occupy participant stated or implied that the current economic paradigm of neoliberal capitalism is a root cause of the problems they perceive in society, and would therefore need to be adjusted or replaced with an entirely different economic system. All

participants save for John (and to a lesser extent, Felix) endorsed working against current social institutions rather than through them.

Tea Party Interviews

Susan

Susan, 70, is an active member of her local Tea Party chapter in Philadelphia. I made contact with her via the Tea Party Patriots (www.teapartypatriots.org) website and we arranged to speak by phone. She was energetic and conveyed her enthusiasm about discussing her ideas about how to improve society. Susan explained that she was never active in politics until getting involved in the Tea Party movement at its inception in 2009. I asked Susan if she could describe her vision of an ideal society, and she responded, "A perfect society? No, we're never going to have that, and we really never did."

I followed up by asking Susan what change in society prompted her participation in the Tea Party demonstrations in 2009. She replied, "The out of control spending, the bail outs, just like they're happening now. And I need to remind you or tell you that this had nothing to do, this wasn't only Obama. Bush's TARP program, and then came Obama and his bailouts." Susan made it clear that Barack Obama's race was not a factor in her motivation to join the Tea Party protests. "It doesn't matter if Obama was red, green, or purple. We don't care. But we do care about fiscal responsibility." She also stressed the non-partisan foundation of the Tea Party, noting that members of her chapter include Republicans, Democrats, independents, and libertarians. She stated that "We all had a common issue that we could join together in, which was fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government, and free markets. And we decided that we would be non-partisan. And being non-partisan is what joined everyone together."

So I asked Susan what she would consider to be the core requirements for a society that is better, with her caveat that and ideal society may not be attainable. She said, "The ideal country would be if we could go back to double-decker ice cream cones for 19 cents (laughter) I'm kidding! But boy oh boy, that would be ideal!" She continued, "Everybody has their own opinion of ideal. Just like some people say "I want to take my country back!" – well, back to what? Everybody has a certain point in time that they would like to take their country back to. Man, I'd love it to go back to double-decker ice cream cones for 19 cents! Maybe you'd like it back to some point when you were younger." So Susan does not advocate for a regression to a specific point in U.S. history, noting that each individual has a different conception of when society was better according to their own criteria.

However, returning to the question of what she sees as wrong in current society, Susan cited a divisiveness in the United States that is unprecedented in her view. She said, "I've never seen a President cause such division, by talking about the rich and just giving to the people in poverty. The poverty is always going to be here and America is always going to take care of them. I'd like to see that division gone." For Susan, the divisiveness breaks along economic lines. Additionally, she laments the lack of community engagement which she attributes to this promotion of divisiveness. She longs for a return to a society "where people were like before where they actually would get together and care about their country and what's good for their country, not what's good for them." In Susan's view, divisiveness promoted for political purposes pushes individuals to look out for themselves instead of working together for the common good.

I asked Susan if she had suggestions for how to reduce or eliminate the division she sees in the United States. She responded, "I truly feel that it would take education. I think ideally the

schools need to go back to teaching history that's American history and what our fore fathers went through. I don't think they're teaching that anymore." She suggested that "They're certainly not teaching civics. They're not teaching things where you can actually learn to get along with people. And that's sad." I ask Susan if the federal government should have a role in education and she responded, "I think the federal government needs to get. Out. Of. The. Way. They need to just do what the constitution says. They need to downsize and they need to stop trying o push their agenda on the United States." From Susan's perspective, the federal government of the United States operates independently of the will of the citizens.

I asked Susan where the power currently held by the federal government should devolve, or if that power should not exist over the population in the first place. She said, "The states need to start reading their state constitution to know what they are allowed to do and what they are not allowed to do. Half of them don't understand it! They don't know the power that the state has." I asked what the ideal role of the federal government is, and Susan responded "Rule of law! They were put in place to make sure rule of law is in place. They're basically trampling over rule of law and doing what they want. The government was put in place to protect us, not to rule over us, not to threaten us." For Susan, the function of a centralized state power is solely to uphold the laws of the people, but currently this power is being abused.

I asked Susan what steps she thinks are needed to take to reorganize society in the fashion she described. She responded, "It would be great to be able to get people into office that are regular people, who care about their country, and care about what's going on in their country, and don't really care about reelection and what's good for them but what's good for the people of the country." Following up on Susan's comment about politicians being concerned with reelection, I asked if she though people should be limited in how long or how often they can

serve in a government office. Susan replied, "I agree with term limits for everybody. Everybody." Susan went on to explain that even the most well-intentioned office-holders are prone to becoming entrenched powers, and that term limits would ensure this could not happen.

Contrary to the majority of Occupy participants interviewed for this study, Susan advocates working to promote change from within the system (a point echoed by every Tea Party member interviewed for this study). She said, "What we're trying to do is get people interested in the local government because everything starts at the local level…If you're going to change the parties, notice I said the parties…if you're going to change the parties, the only way you're going to do it is from within." Similar to Felix from OccupyDC, she advocates for participation at the local level: "Become a committee person, get on school boards. Any place where they make decision on the money, which is your money, that's where you need to be."

I asked Susan if she had suggestions for getting people who have not previously been involved in their community to take action, as she did in 2009. Susan stressed that everyone had something to contribute, no matter their own perceived limitations, so long as they had the desire and motivation to promote positive change in their community. "This is what I talk about when I go to groups – everyone here has a talent! Some of you don't' like to knock on the door, but you can write a letter. Some of you can't write a letter but you can make a phone call. Every one of you has a talent, and you have to use those talents."

Susan then described what she perceives as the primary differences between Tea Party members and the "left":

> The difference between us, who are say grassroots conservative, and the left, is that we all have an individual mind, a mind of our own. Where we think about something, we work it out, it might be different than what your husband is thinking about. Because he's working it out his way, you're working it out your way, and maybe your neighbor is working it out there way. The thing about the left is they think alike.

Susan cited this independent thinking as both a strength and a hindrance to the Tea Party cause. The strength lies in the multitude of ideas from which to draw from. However, the "reason the left gets what they want is because they focus on an issue, they go after it, and they win. Whereas us, on the right, we're more individual, more creative, we're this, we're that. And we say, okay, what happened?! But we're going to fix that."

I asked Susan to discuss an example of something that differentiates her ideas of how to create a better society from the "left":

> The rich have to pay more? The wealthiest Americans have to pay? The way I feel, those people earned that money. They shouldn't have to take care of us. My husband and I have been working – I was 14 when I started working, actually before that because my father had a bar and restaurant for 35 years. So we've worked all our lives, we never expected a hand out. We went through three layoffs. And when my husband got laid off we went out and worked three jobs each!

Thomas

Thomas, 66, is a leading member of a Tea Party chapter in Northern Virginia. Like Susan, Thomas indicated that he was not politically active in his community prior to joining the Tea Party movement, saying "I've lived in my community for 20 years or more than 20 years, and the first time I met a bunch of people was this year when I went out and started door-knocking for the Republican Party stuff." He agreed to meet me at a local public library to discuss his ideas for what is needed to form an ideal society. When we arrived, we toured the library looking for a spot to sit down and talk, however all the desks and couches were occupied. Ultimately we found that the only available place to sit was in the children's reading section. So Thomas and I squeezed into child-sized chairs at a low-to-the-ground table atop a carpet decorated with colorful cartoon characters, and began to discuss how best to improve society.

I asked Thomas how he would organize his ideal society. He responded, "Oh I think that basically people have to be safe, you have to have a strong defense, you have to have an educated populace. You have to have a future for the kids, jobs and that kind of thing. Prosperity. Be able to take care of the older folks. You need to sustain the society." Safety and education were topics Thomas would often return to during our conversation. He said, "Education – I think it's gotta change. Universities are way too expensive. Why it should cost anything is amazing to me."

For Thomas, higher level education was important enough to "sustaining society" that he believed it should be free to all those qualified to enter. I asked him to talk about what he perceives to be problematic with how education is currently structured in the United States, beyond the high cost. He replied, "I think now kids are being sort of indoctrinated in many cases, with sort of socialist, liberal – that seems to be where all the teachers have come out of that system. I think that the teachers don't go back far enough in the history – they start at the civil war and everything is race based and that kind of thing." From Thomas' perspective, a predominant focus on race exacerbates divisions in society. He continued, "I think the melting pot idea is much better. Be proud of where you came from I think – my wife is Japanese for instance, and I'm Scotch-Irish and German. It doesn't seem to be an issue at all unless you get a liberal get in the middle of it." Thomas also decried the use of race as a metric for academic success: "For example Virginia is now looking at accomplishment based on your race as opposed to just your accomplishment. I think that kind of thing has no place in society and I think being colorblind and the melting pot is a much better deal."

Thomas at one point referenced the U.S. Department of Education as a part of the federal government that could be excised. I asked Thomas if there is a role for any sort of centralized

state power with regard to education. He responded, "No, no I don't think so. Again I think that politicians have gotten way too much into it. Part of it is because of the way the public employees support the politicians and they build their political machine based on that." For Thomas, the problem with centralizing authority over education (and I interpreted his comments to apply to at least some other functions of government as well) was that it allows the influence of a few to affect the national agenda.

So I asked Thomas, if education is key to a well-functioning society, and if a centralized organization of education is easily tainted by politics over practicality, what is the solution? He suggested "laying out a curriculum that's not slanted one way or the other, especially in history – I mean its – one person's victory is another person's slaughter. You can talk both sides of it but I don't think trying to sell one political thing is a good idea. It supports the melting pot theory as well."

Considering that Thomas was suspicious of centralized state power with regard to education, I asked Thomas what role there was, if any, for the federal government. He responded "Defense, protection, basic utilities, the ability to let people interact without stepping on one another. You know, killing each other off or harming the planet." For Thomas, the power of the state should be limited to governing the interactions between members of society, and regulating things like the environment. He also advocates for a state role in governing the economy with regard to interactions with other countries, saying "Just keep an even playing field internationally, if they can. Like for instance the Chinese taking all our jobs, that sort of thing." Thomas suggested similar roles for state and local governments, saying "I think that again they should serve their population and make sure their population thrives and have what they need as best as they can do that and let them do whatever they want to do inside of that structure."

I asked Thomas about his views on how a member of a society should relate to the

government. He responded that "The citizen should be the person in charge. The government

should serve the citizen – the citizen shouldn't serve the government." I asked if this means he

believes in a bottom-up, grassroots power structure and he agreed. However, while Thomas

indicates that technically that is how to United States representative government ought to work,

he notes problems with how the system operates, particularly with regard to electing people to

office. One area where Thomas has been active with other Tea Party movement members is in

working to ensure that the elections are as free from fraud and manipulation as possible, which

he asserted is important to maintain faith in the concept of democracy. He described one

strategy he has participated in towards this end:

> Well what I've done, probably one of the most effective things we've done – you
> know True the Vote[8] here in Virginia? We look at large households, households
> with over 10 people in the house. Then we look to see, if there are ten unrelated
> men we then look to see if we can challenge any of these men for any reason. For
> instance some of them might have been registered there five years ago but then
> sold the house. Or there'd be like ten Muslims - I've seen a lot of houses like this
> – and you've got all these folks and their not related and they sure don't look like
> citizens. But their paperwork's all valid. I don't know what you can do about
> that, but it seems odd to me.

Thomas also explained how volunteers will compare death records for the past few years to voter

rolls and report names which have not yet been removed from the active registration lists.

Another strategy he described is to look through jury duty forms and flag people who have

indicated they are not a citizen in order to get out of jury duty and again compare these names to

the active voter registration lists. He uses these activities as examples of how a person can be an

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[8]   True the Vote is an organization based in Houston, Texas which describes itself as "a citizen-led effort to
restore truth, faith, and integrity to our elections." The organization relies on volunteers in states around the country
to promote the passage of voter identification laws, review voter registration rolls to ensure only confirmed U.S.
citizens are listed, serve as election monitors, and a number of other functions designed to help "stop corruption
where it can start – at the polls." More information is available at www.truethevote.org/about (accessed July 3,
2013).

active part of the community they live in and have a positive effect on the smooth operation of their government.

I then asked Thomas how people should relate to their community. He responded, "Well I think it's kind of a case by case the way I see it. Probably we oughta do more with the neighbors." However, he noted that "often times you've got more in common with somebody who might be in Japan or in another country because his livelihood and your livelihood might depend on manufacturing a good car or something like that. Or if their plant goes down you can't do anything.   In that case you're more affected by that guy than you would be the person who lives next to you." This is a point not raised by any other Tea Party or Occupy participants in this study – the idea that one barrier to forming local community connections is the fact that, in a globalized society, it may be an anonymous person or community thousands of miles away which have a greater impact on your own livelihood. While Thomas did not indicate whether he thought this was a negative reality, he did seem to lament his perception of a lack of "neighborliness" in the United States. "You know what I think did that? Air conditioning. You never see the other people! (laughter)."

Lloyd

Lloyd, 74, is a leader of a Tea Party chapter in Northern Virginia who I made contact with by sending an email through chapter's website contact form. He and I arranged to speak by phone, during which he explained his participation in the Tea Party and his ideas for how he thinks an ideal society would be organized. He said, "A good starting point would be to kinda tell you how we've articulated our mission. Essentially, I'm actually quoting from our mission statement, but we saw our mission as to encourage peaceful citizen participation in the existing

political system." For Lloyd a key component of any ideal society is increased engagement in the political process, and his efforts with the Tea Party are intended to lay that foundation. "We empower those people with a desire to make it work again."

Lloyd's statement implies that U.S. society once "worked" and that there are people who wish to "make it work again." His perspective is that there has "been a fundamental shift away from people directing the course of their lives and directing the course of how government functions" towards a top-down style of central government "dictating how we should live and what we should do with our lives." Yet Lloyd also made clear that his goal is not reverse history, saying "In the Tea Party you probably hear us continually going back to the founder's vision for the United States. It's not taking a step back 300 years into the past – there are many things that have been added that are probably okay."

Considering that Lloyd explicitly states he would not "step back 300 years into the past," I asked him if, in his perception, the Tea Party was more about reform than revolution? He responded by comparing the Tea Party with members of Occupy that he knew personally, saying "I think they tend to be more anarchist. They want to turn the entire system on its head. They want to get rid of the capitalist form of government in this country, and would do anything to turn that over." The Tea Party, however, is "not of a mind that there's anything fundamentally wrong with the free market system that a little bit of fine tuning wouldn't help." From Lloyd's perspective a more ideal society is possible by making adjustments to the current paradigm rather than requiring a new type of social order.

Lloyd elaborated on some of the issues that need reform, including taxation, regulation, and education. For Lloyd, there has been a "fundamental change in the way that our children are being educated." He described how on the one hand, "They are not teaching…what a republic is

all about, how America functions," while on the other "There is a lot of, we can say, political ideology that is creeping into the education system." This, according to Lloyd, results in students not fully understanding the benefits of the U.S. system of social organization while being influenced by "people in this country who in essence believe that a socialist form of government is preferable to a republican form of government." He also decried the vilification of the traditional U.S. system, saying "it's the way the discussion and the debate is formed so when they talk about our system of government in the United States its always kind of presented that we're the bad guys, capitalism is evil, socialism does more for the good of the people."

When asked to describe the relationship between the people and the government in an ideal society, Lloyd referred to one of the goals of the Tea Party: increasing civil engagement. He said, "My feeling is that we like to take things on in a responsible way, we do a lot of educational programs to try to get the public educated to try to understand what the issues are, and rather than trying to just leave them with that get them engaged in actually working on this stuff." Lloyd then provides an example, explaining how he uses his Tea Party organization's online network of members to solicit volunteers to review legislation in Virginia. "Right now there are about 2,800 bills, I don't think we'll be able to review 2,800 but we'll probably look at the top 500-600 bills and have our people review these bills and offer comments and go in and attend subcommittee meetings and let people know whether we are opposed or supportive of particular bills and on what grounds," he said. For Lloyd, working together to promote a better oversight of government action will help improve society. "The government works for the people – we employ them. And I think the people need to stand up and articulate their concerns." Lloyd was emphatic when stressing the importance of civic engagement: "To be

actively involved [ensures] that the federal government understands that they work for us, we're

not essentially slaves to them."

The notion of active participation as a mechanism for staving off state oppression is

common among many Occupy and Tea Party participants. I asked Lloyd what sees the role of

state power being. He responded, "The government has a responsibility to manage the military,

provide for a national defense….managing our airport system, managing international travel,

interstate highway system, working with the local states, I think that's important. Should the

government be involved in Education? Absolutely not." Lloyd also suggested a role for the

EPA with regard to "of regulating pollutants and coming up with appropriate resources to clean

up toxic waste." However, all other aspects of governance would fall to the state or local level.

"The states are closer to the issues closer to the problem. I think that our view would be is that

government that is closer to the problem is in a better position to deal with some of these issues

than a government that's operating out of Washington, DC."

Helen

Helen belongs to a chapter of the Tea Party Patriots based out of North Carolina. She

responded to a request I sent her on the Tea Party Patriots website and agreed to talk with me by

phone.

I asked Helen how she would organize her ideal society. She responded by first

describing what she perceived as a barrier to achieving a more perfect society, saying

"Unfortunately I believe that too many people are being taught what to think, not how to think."

Helen compared the current state of education in the United States to that available to the

"founders" of the nation, noting that James Madison "had to have sat in stacks of history of

different cultures and civilizations, of what worked and what didn't" in order to develop the U.S. system of government. For Helen, practical knowledge is key to creating and maintaining a system that works. She stated that it was necessary to understand "The pros and cons, the seeing things in action versus going based solely on assumptions, or sticking to an ideology when it's been shown to fail…To understand why direct democracy has failed. Or where pure tyranny has failed." From Helen's perspective, this practical approach to understanding the world has been undermined. "We're not being taught the whole picture anymore. I believe that is needed for the understanding of a perfect society."

I asked Helen to elaborate on how she thinks education can help people be in a better position to guide society in the right direction. She responded, "Knowledge, pure knowledge, not indoctrination, is critical to achieve certain levels of acceptance in certain areas. So, for Tea Party Patriots, education is a key." Helen continued, saying "Masses have been abused and manipulated by misinformation and disinformation over the ages. To teach people to have critical thought and not just go for the agreement or pure indoctrination. For me that is the key." A perception of indoctrination and a goal to teach critical thinking was a common theme among participants from both groups interviewed for this study. Helen adds that she is generally suspicious of information that is distributed from a central source: "I always question if it comes from the top-down, is it pure? So I'd rather it be from the grassroots up."

During our conversation, Helen demonstrated a great reverence to the founding institutions of the United States, but also advocated for a flexibility in the mechanisms for organizing and operating society, citing the importance of having "the humility to know when something's not working." I asked her how she reconciles these two views: "Article 1, section 8. Those are the enumerated powers that the U.S. government is supposed to have. 10th

amendment. Any powers not defined for the federal government should be left to the state." I asked Helen if I was correct to interpret her statement to mean that whereas the federal government is ideally limited both in its powers and its ability to modify those powers, the state and local governments have more flexibility in how they organize society. She replied that "The government that governs least governs best. The government that is closest to the people." Helen then described the advantage to leaving most policies to be handled by the local government. "You have direct relationship with [your representatives]. That's the wonderful thing – if you don't like something, if you walk into the grocery store and see your county commissioner, you have an opportunity to be truly represented." She continued, saying "Unfortunately what has happen with the two party system that we have, is when somebody goes to Washington the question becomes, who are you representing? Are you representing the Democratic Party or the Republican Party? Are you now representing the United States instead of the citizenry you are supposed to represent?"

Another recurring theme, particular among Tea Party members, was the idea of the federal government working towards its own agenda, separate from the will of the people. Her above comment elicited the question of what the relationship should be between the people and the government. Helen suggested that "There should be no difference from my neighbor standing across the street or representing me whether it's the state capitol or in DC. In other words, they should not change at all. They were sent there to be representative of the people. And for the people." From Helen's perspective, even well-intentioned politicians are prone to succumbing to the agenda of power once they are removed from their local environment. "Unfortunately people go forgetting Washington is a cesspool and start thinking it's a hot tub, because they start living in that bubble, in that echo chamber of what's going on there." She

cites specifically the problems she views as inherent to the two-party system, saying that "[Politicians] feed on that lust for power. They go 'Hey, we'll give you this position on this committee if you do X, Y, or Z, for the party.' They become corrupted by that."

So a core component to the goal of achieving a better society in Helen's view is the promotion of a system in which power is less corrupting. She suggested that this could be accomplished by modifying the culture and attitude of those who achieve power (or alternatively more careful selection of those to whom power is ceded). Helen went on to note a similar importance of culture and attitude when describing the ideal relationship between the individual and their community:

> I'm laissez-faire, live and let live kind of person. Definitely free market, live and let live, as long as I'm not directly hurting somebody, I should be free to do, same with my neighbor…All you have to do in life, there's three things you can practice, tolerance and acceptance (because I think they go hand in hand), and charity.

Gerry

Gerry, 55, is a member of a Tea Party chapter based in Northern Virginia. After a career in engineering, Gerry was able to retire early to a comfortable life in a relatively well-off neighborhood. Gerry got in contact with me after another local Tea Party member forwarded him my email. He invited me to lunch at a Chinese restaurant he frequents near his house, and we discussed his idea of an ideal society.

Gerry started by describing requirements that were, in his view, essential to promoting a more perfect society. He said, "From my perspective, fiscal responsibility, constitutionally limited government, and the free market are the key." Gerry commented that he had not previously been particularly involved in politics, and I asked him what drew him to the Tea

Party. He responded, "They started talking more like libertarians, but certainly not like big government Republicans and Democrats, who just want to make – we don't even know where they're going. They're just making the government bigger, and bigger – getting everybody everything that you can't afford." He went on to explain that he bases his views about an ideal society on the U.S. Constitution and its 17 enumerated powers, and beyond that the individual states would be sovereign. For example, Gerry stated that in his ideal society, "social programs would not be run by the federal government." I asked him if they could be run by the states, and he replied, "Oh sure! The states can do whatever they want to do. That's liberty. Liberty means I don't have to worry about what California does and they don't have to worry about what Virginia does. We live in the same country, but I don't have to tell them what to do and they don't have to tell me what to do."

I asked Gerry how he suggests people correct what he views as overreach by the federal government. He responded, "Vote with your feet! What's better than that? That's about as good as you're going to get. Because as soon as you get people in congress and they can go outside of the constitution, there's no stopping them." Like other Tea Party participants, Gerry values the institution of democracy and working within the system to reform it. However, he also sees the risk in giving too much power to representatives, no matter how good their intentions might be. He said, "They love power. They want to do good things with their power. The only thing is that they want to do what they think is good and lord it over the rest of us." Similar to Helen (and John from Occupy), Gerry approaches social change from a practical perspective. He said, "In my opinion, I would not construct society. I certainly wouldn't mandate it by government. I'd rather see the culture just slowly roll over. Like Massachusetts, their health care system – if they want it, great! If it comes to Virginia, I'd have to look at it and

see what is looked like." In his example he does not dismiss the idea of a Massachusetts-style healthcare system, but he does want the opportunity to examine the policy and vote on its implementation.

I asked Gerry if this means that in his view state power should be derived from the bottom-up. He responded, "If you push down the laws as low as you can get on them, now all of a sudden I have a say. I have no say at all in the federal government in our representatives or the Senate because I don't have enough money." On the other hand, Gerry experiences greater agency at the local level, saying "Just yesterday I had an email conversation with my delegate over a piece of legislation that he's working on. I'm in! At the state level I'm in! I can actually participate in government the lower it is. The higher it is – I have no power." From Gerry's perspective, transferring power from the federal to the state government increases his own ability to have a voice in how he is governed because the distance (both physical and metaphorical) between him and those that represent him politically is decreased. "I have much more faith in the state government than the federal government in terms of making decisions that affect my life." During our conversation, Gerry frequently reiterates the notion that the governments of the U.S. states, being focused on a narrow geographic and demographic area, are best suited to respond to the needs and desires of their citizens. He is agnostic with regard to what those needs and desires might be – "If the states want to have social security, if they want to have Medicare, if you can get people to pay for it and stay there, then have at it!" The key for Gerry is the idea that individuals have increased agency in their community, and that that agency is currently being impeded by an overreaching federal government.

That same overreach, from Gerry's perspective, affects how people choose to interact with each other. When I asked Gerry what he thought was the ideal relationship between the

individual and the community, he replied, "Whatever they want it to be. It depends on your

culture and on your background and on your proximity to your neighbors and all of the above."

Yet he continued, explaining that the fact that he pays taxes which are then used to support social

safety nets makes him less inclined to provide direct assistance on his own.

> I find myself getting less involved with people who might be having issues the more the federal government gets involved because I assume they're going to take care of them. So if I see a homeless person out here on Route 1, I whiz right past them. I pay taxes out the wazoo to pay for all kinds of stuff for this person. I'll point them towards the shelter, there's a shelter right across the road.

Gerry made it clear that he helps his neighbors. "I've got a neighbor that lost his job. So there

are several of us in the neighborhood who kind of watch him, check in on him. We help out any

way we can – we're ready to help out. But that's just us – I wouldn't mandate that on anybody."

For Gerry, charity cannot be an enforced activity without affecting the freedom of those to

choose where they wish to help. "If you have someone who's a recluse and doesn't want to

[help out the neighborhood], I wouldn't drag him out of his house to make him to anything. Just

let him be free."

Finally, I asked Gerry what the first steps would be towards achieving this ideal society.

He advocates for increased community engagement and for an open discussion about how people

want to organize their societies. "If you said that the constitution simply doesn't matter

anymore, that that happened a long time ago and we need to change, that should be the point of

the argument. But not everybody has that understanding – because then you don't have rule of

law. It's a soft-log that you can't stand on." Gerry has his own views of how society should be

organized, but underlying those views is his intense focus on the right of the people to debate the

issues, come to their own conclusions, and choose the path their community will take. Most

importantly, people need to have access to and an understanding of the facts in order to make

those decisions. "That's the first step – letting people understand. If they understand this, and they reject it, I completely respect that."

Frank

As I was finishing up my conversation with Susan, she offered to put me in touch with her husband, Frank, who she suspected would be able to offer a different perspective on the Tea Party. Like Susan, Frank became active in a chapter of the Tea Party based out of Philadelphia at the very beginning of the movement.

I phoned Frank and asked him how he would organize his "ideal society." He responded, "Well I don't have to reinvent the wheel. I just have to direct you to the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the Constitution, and the Federalist Papers. If I were starting from scratch that's exactly where I'd start." For Frank, it is unnecessary to develop a new paradigm. Instead, the foundation for a better society lies in the work already performed by the founders of the United States. "We started out as a constitutional republic and over the years, really I think what we are now is a regulatory democracy." I asked Frank if fixing the problems he perceives with current society is requires that people understand the documents he listed better than they do currently. He agreed and went further, stating that "from 1900 forward the level of the education has been degraded down to where today college students graduate with the comprehension in science, math, and English at the level of an 8th grader in the late 1800s. So education is one of the reasons why we are the way we are."

The notion that the depth of education was lacking in current society continued to be a common theme among the participants of this study. I asked Frank what other negative influences have prompted a degradation of the social order. He replied swiftly that the financial

industry, and the association between money and power more generally, have corrupted the ideals laid out in the four documents he cited above. "There's two ways to have power in my opinion. One is by money, the other is by flesh and blood. The only thing that the Tea Party has, as a grassroots American movement, is flesh and blood – that is the people. The financiers, the bankers – they have all the money."

I asked Frank so suggest what ideas he had for reducing the impact of greed and promoting better education in order to lay the foundation for a better society. He responded that "There are certain pillars in society, in any society, that need to be there. You have to have the rule of law, and when I say the rule of law it's that the law is made for law abiding citizens." To illustrate his point, Frank offered an example of a person obeying a law even though no one was watching and no negative consequences would result from breaking it. A functioning society, for Frank, must be based on the prevalence of this attitude among the population.

At the same time, Frank does not believe that the population should blindly accept what their leaders (and the lobbyists who support them) say should be the law of the land. "We can go back to doing our civic responsibility of going to meetings locally and finding out what our elected officials, either in a council or county commissioner board or even the state legislature, senate, and governorship, what are they doing with our tax dollars?" Moreover, he envisions political leaders ideally as conduits of the public will. He suggests that "all legislation really should be written by the citizens in that you'd visit you state representative or state senator and say look, I have an idea as a citizen, and talk to him about that." Currently, however, "That's not happening. Lobbyists and special interests, because of the money, they get the attention. So civic responsibility should be to monitor and insist on accountability with your local government." Frank notes his own experience working with the Tea Party to produce change by

encouraging people to call their U.S. representatives, saying "We have actually caused Congressmen to change their vote because they were attuned to what the citizens wanted."

I asked Frank what, in his opinion, has led to what he perceives as an increasing shift of power from communities and states to the federal government. He suggests that this trend began when economic forces required that both parents in a given family needed to work. "I feel the breakup of the family and daycare centers and this Headstart which does absolutely nothing for people, it's been proven, all that goes to change minds and really to brainwash them so that when they do go through High School that the curriculum has changed so much that they don't teach civics, they teach social sciences, social whatever, social studies." This education, from Frank's perspective, is designed to instill an affinity for a powerful central government, and is only further reinforced in universities where "there's less conservative thought than progressive thought."

Frank laments the top-down power of the current paradigm and explains that the Tea Party is working to upend that power structure, noting that while the Tea Party and the Occupy movement were, in his view, motivated by similar issues, the Tea Party was more truly grassroots in structure:

> You really have to look at the originators of the grassroots American movement. They started out calling themselves the Tax-Day Tea Party and they changed their name to the Tea Party Patriots. They are bottom-up – absolutely bottom-up, and they have in excess of 3400 groups and in the millions of people. You take the Occupiers, I believe they were co-opted and financed, in my opinion, by the radical left. I think that the leaders, the ones who were speaking, were put up in hotels, hot meals were delivered to them, and so forth and so on. I think they were top-down. And if you notice, they're not around anymore.

Summary of Tea Party Interviews

All Tea Party participants promoted a reversal of the current paradigm of federal power being paramount over state and local power. They described locally derived governance as being better suited to the needs of their communities than governance by those who have little to no connection to, or understanding of, their local concerns. There was a common theme of a loss of faith in representative democracy, where even local people elected to represent local concerns in the federal government become influenced and corrupted by the central power.

Most of the participants stressed the importance of fiscal responsibility, limited government, and free markets to a well functioning society. Achieving these would, in their view, lay the foundation for an "ideal society" by allowing individuals and communities to determine what works best for them without a central state power dictating their actions or using tax money to pay off debt incurred to fund programs not desired by those individuals and communities.

Education was also a common theme among all the Tea Party participants. Most lamented the lack of quality of education as well as what they perceived as liberal indoctrination via the education system. In line with their promotion of locally-derived power, participants favored making decisions about education at the local or state level, free of influence from the federal government.

The Tea Party participants also universally favored increased civic engagement in current social institutions, especially related to education and local governance. Participants like Thomas and Lloyd promote working to oversee the work of their government and alerting their communities when they identify problems or actions that need to be taken.

CONCLUSIONS

Similarities Between Occupy and the Tea Party

There were four prominent themes that were shared by most participants from the Tea Party and Occupy movements: the power of education as both a tool of indoctrination and of liberation; freedom from oppression imposed by the state; demand for a bottom-up, grassroots power structure responsive to local demands; and a lack of faith in the motivations and morality of those currently in power.

Nearly all the participants from both groups mentioned education as both a factor in the current dysfunction of society and a tool to reshape the society. John from Occupy lamented that we "train" people instead of teaching them critical thinking skills and asserted that "you need an educated population before you can have a democracy." This view was shared by Helen from the Tea Party when she states that "too many people are being taught what to think, not how to think" and stressed the importance of knowledge over indoctrination. Mickey from Occupy insisted that "Education is the key to everything. That is the key. You have to educate people," and this sentiment was echoed by his roommate Felix who pursues "Resistance through education." Frank, and Susan from the Tea Party commented on their perceived lack of quality in the current U.S. education system, while Thomas was concerned about children being "indoctrinated in many cases, with sort of socialist, liberal" philosophy. Karen from Occupy noted that education "shapes who we are, what we think."

This focus on education demonstrates that these members of Occupy and the Tea Party perceive the widespread acceptance of their ideology as important to the cause of shaping a better society. Though most participants from both groups repeatedly stress that they seek to minimize oppression or coercion and/or maximize freedom and liberty, their calls for better

education assume that A) once educated "properly" most people will come to the same conclusion held by their fellow movement members, and B) achieving their ideal society requires a certain threshold of adherents to that ideology. Members of both groups mentioned mechanisms for allowing different styles of community (the spokes or regional councils in Occupy and the independence of the individual states in the Tea Party). However, these mechanisms can only function in the absence of a larger centralized state power that asserts its will over constituent communities. Thus, participants from both groups indicated that achieving their ideal societies will require that the power structure be changed and that a major tool to bring about that change is education.

The opposition to state oppression was another common theme among participants from both Occupy and the Tea Party. Matteo from Occupy sees the state bureaucracy as an oppressive force which only exists due to the alienation of members of individual communities caused by the exploitation of people for their labor. He said, "No matter what, [the state] is always going to get in the way of people acting in a collective nature to be mutually supportive of one another." Mickey from Occupy also describes the state as being an oppressive apparatus, saying that "if there is going to be any kind of state structure then there will be inherent hierarchy and then domination that comes naturally from that kind of system" and Felix expressed similar sentiments. From the Tea Party, Susan decried use of state power to redistribute wealth and Lloyd wants the central government to stop "dictating how we should live and what we should do with our lives. Helen from the Tea Party asserted that "The government that governs least governs best" and Gerry said that "liberty means I don't have to worry about what California does and they don't have to worry about what Virginia does."

The general consensus among the participants from both groups was that a centralized power is A) too far removed from individuals and communities to fully understand their needs and desires with regard to how they function, and as a result, B) that that centralized power invariably begins to develop its own agenda separate from the aggregate needs of the population it serves.

Flowing from their conception of central government as being too oppressive is a shared appreciation the value of local determination and a bottom-up style of governance. Most participants from both Occupy and the Tea Party stressed that decisions for a community are best made at the community level. Matteo from Occupy said people "have the ability as part of a community or part of a group to determine their outcome" and Mickey promoted the value of "Empowering people to have decisions in the own community about what goes on." Felix noted the importance of communities coming together to meet their needs and Karen strongly advocated for a "community approach" for a well-functioning society. Helen from the Tea Party prefers a grassroots style of democracy, a position expressed by the majority of Tea Party participants. Gerry said that "If you push the laws as low as you can get on them, now all of a sudden I have a say." Frank and Lloyd both commented on the importance of a bottom-up structure of governance.

Finally, participants from Occupy and the Tea Party had similar conceptions about the lack of representation they currently perceive with regard to the central state power. John from Occupy commented that "money in politics has led to a very corrupt system. Our politicians are bought," a view shared by Gerry from the Tea Party when he said "I have no say at all in the federal government, in our representatives, or in the Senate because I don't have enough money." Felix from Occupy hopes for a society "Where money isn't the driving force of who is

actually making the decisions." Karen's call for wholesale change to the social structure is based on her view that things are too "fucked up to do anything with what we have now," which is echoed by Steve who states that "If you're not in the ruling class, you're not getting anywhere." Susan from the Tea Party is working to "get people into office that are regular people, who care about their country…and don't really care about reelection and what's good for them but what's good for the country." Lloyd's advocacy for more civic engagement is designed to ensure that "the federal government understands they work for us, we're not essentially slaves to them." Helen suggests that even well-meaning people go to Washington, DC "forgetting that [it's] a cesspool and start thinking it's a hot tub, because they start living in that bubble."

In all of the interviews there were comments from the participants which stressed their suspicion of power, and specifically that of a centralized state which could employ its power over a diffuse area. Even those seeking to represent their communities with the best of intentions are ultimately corrupted by that power either through their own growing greed or through the pressure and influence of the political structures that are already in place.

Differences Between Occupy and the Tea Party

The results of my interviews revealed two key differences in expressed social philosophy between the Tea Party and Occupy participants. The first was related to their perceptions of the value of current institutions. Occupy participants predominantly shared a suspicion of the value of these institutions and asserted a need to eliminate them in favor of new, organically derived institutions. From the perspective of the Occupy participants, current social institutions serve not only as a mechanism for coercion and oppression, but also to corrupt the people who populate those institutions. Tea Party participants predominantly favored the continuation of current

86

institutions with a focus on reform and/or reversion to older forms of these institutions. Tea Party participants in this study indicated that the problems in society are not due to the institutions themselves, but rather due to the types of people who populate, operate, and ultimately corrupt the work of those institutions.

Flowing from these perspectives is the second key difference between the two groups: the choice of strategy to achieve change. Occupy participants opt to attack the current system from without, whereas Tea Party participants seek to reform the current system from within. Save for John (and to a certain extent, Felix), all Occupy participants consider most current social institutions in the United States corrupt or beyond repair to the point of invalidating the idea of working within the system. Capitalism, representative democracy, division of federal and state power, and education are examples of institutionalized processes to which most Occupy participants ascribe the source of current problems in society and which therefore impede progress towards a more ideal society. Though they proceed from different perspectives (Steve seeks revolution whereas Felix allows for the value of limited participation in institutions at the local level), each ultimately views the sweeping away of the current structures as necessary for sustained and positive change. Even John, who does not require the total elimination of these institutions, deplores their corruption and advocates for massive changes over time.

Tea Party participants were consistent in their support of institutions even as they decried what they perceive as corruption. Whereas most of the Occupy participants implied that social institutions were corrupting the functioning of relationships between individuals and communities, Tea Part participants described the reverse. The consensus among Tea Party participants was that the institutions in their purest forms are excellent, but they have malfunctioned under supervision and operation by corrupt people, who in turn co-opt those

institutions for the purpose of the expansion of power (both personal power and that of the state and the state's allies). As such, the strategy of the Tea Party as described by participants in this study is to wrest power away from the corrupting influences by their own active engagement. They seek not to eliminate these social institutions but instead to take them over from the inside, starting at the hyper-local levels (school boards, county commissioners, city councils) and working their way up.

The difference in strategy is at least partly based on each group's views of the currently predominant paradigm of social organization based on capitalism. Occupy participants cited capitalism as a key cause of current problems in society, noting that A) as a system it requires the entire population to participate while ultimately enriching only a small percentage of that population, B) the requirement to work long hours for basic needs impinges on people's relationships with their family and their community and C) the importance of money in the capitalist system allows those who have it to wield it over politicians and policymakers as a method of further improving their own positions. Tea Party participants, on the other hand, indicated that overregulation of what should be a free market limited the freedom of individuals and communities to make decisions based on local concerns. Participants from both groups live in under the same economic system yet perceive the current functioning of that system differently – with Occupy lamenting the lack of regulation and the Tea Party fighting against over-regulation.

Meaning and Motivation

As Edelman has noted, anthropological work is not well suited to the creation of grand theories which can be generalized across a wide range of topics (2001:286). Rather, following

Hess, we seek to elaborate upon a specific case in an effort to increase understanding of how humans interact at the intersection specific historical, cultural, and temporal contexts. Many scholars have theorized that the Tea Party and Occupy movements arose in reaction to various threats, whether economic (with regard to the financial crash of 2008) (Langman 2011) or social (flaws in the functioning of representative democracy and the diminution of white male power) (Campbell 2011; Langman 2011; Lundskow 2012; Nugent 2012; Walker 2011).

The data I have presented in this study provides evidence to support some of the notions listed above and is inadequate to support or refute others. Nugent's theory of the lack of faith in representative democracy is well demonstrated by the words and actions of each participant in this study. Though the perspectives may vary significantly, each participant declared the malfunctioning of the current system of representation as a primary motivator for action. Globalization was mentioned by a few Occupy participants as an implicit symptom of the root cause of the corruption of society, which is capitalism in general.

Langman's assertion that members of the Tea Party are motivated by a desire to protect their relative social position by "resisting 'evil elites' above and the 'dangerous classes' from below" is supported by the interview data for this study, though participants did not use the adjectives 'evil' or 'dangerous' (Langman 2011). All Tea Party participants commented on the practical and moral problems associated with a central state power affecting local and individual decisions. At the same time, unlike Occupy participants, Tea Party participants do not suggest eliminating state power entirely, employing multiple references to the importance of the "rule of law" to maintain order (and by extension maintain the stability of their position in society).

Less well supported from my data is the notion of the diminution of white male power, though nothing in the data directly refutes this theory either. Both Campbell and Langman argue

that this erosion of white male privilege provided motivation for political action on the parts of Occupy and Tea Party members (Campbell 2011; Langman 2011). Susan from the Tea Party commented that it didn't "matter if Obama was red, green, or purple" indicating she is aware of the perception that the Tea Party is motivated by racial animus, however none of her statements during the interview supported this perception. Thomas made comments that implied a certain suspicion of the "other," especially with regard to Muslims. However, none of the other Tea Party participants formed arguments for their positions based on the exclusion of specific groups of people and instead relied on the internal logic of their philosophies of social organization to make their points. The Occupy interviews similarly lacked any clear indication that their motivation stemmed from a lack of white male privilege.

Lundskow asserts that the Tea Party's philosophies "suggest a racially motivated authoritarianism and destructiveness rather than any particular political commitment" (Lundskow 2012:529). None of the data from Tea Party participants in this study support this notion. The interview data demonstrates a clear and relatively consistent set of political philosophies and activities among the Tea Party participants, and those philosophies are pursued with the seemingly sincere intention of reducing authoritarianism and increasing social stability. Whether or not the proposed policies would achieve these goals is a matter of debate, but contrary to Lundskow's assertion of a lack of "political commitment" the participants for this study explained their positions in well-articulated and consistent detail. However, the limited nature of this study does not demonstrate that Lundskow's assertion may not be true for Tea Party members more generally. Moreover, Tea Party participants interviewed for this study did imply by their focus on the importance of the "rule of law" that coercion by the state was valid if derived and applied closer to the community level.

The formation of the Tea Party coinciding with the inauguration of President Obama is not, by itself, clear evidence of racial motivation. First, the Tea Party's generally conservative nature would suggest a dismay with any Democrat elected to the presidency. Second, because of the unique historical context with regard to the financial collapse and the resulting government bailouts implemented by President Bush and continued by President Obama, it is difficult to parse out racial motivations from concerns over fiscal stability, the latter of which has been a prominent cause in conservative circles for many years and is preeminent among Tea Party participants. Likewise, Occupy's success in motivating and recruiting such large numbers of people around the country and the world may owe more to the innovative tactics of occupation than to a degradation of white male privilege. Calhoun and Juris both note that protests against the financial and state power apparatuses had existed long before Occupy, but that Occupy worked because of the strategy it employed (Calhoun 2013; Juris 2012).

Campbell, Walker, and Langman make compelling arguments regarding the role of race in the Occupy and Tea Party movements, however the results of this study do not provide sufficient evidence to support or refute them. It is important to note that a single interview with each participant is insufficient to adequately determine what role perceptions of race may have in informing each participant's view on social organization. This is especially true when taking into account the environment of the interviews, in which participants would likely not assume they were talking with a person aligned with their worldview. Though clear evidence of a connection between the threat to white male privilege and the motivations of Occupy and Tea Party participants was not discovered over the course of my interviews, evidence of a racial component presented by Campwell, Walker, Langman, and Lundskow cannot be dismissed.

In terms of understanding the major distinctions between the ideal societies described by Occupy and Tea Party participants interviewed for this study, Max Weber provides important insight with his description of centralized state power. He asserts that "the modern state is a compulsory association which organizes domination" and that the state can be defined in terms of the extent of its ability to use physical force to ensure compliance by the people to the demands of the state (Weber 1946). Participants from both Occupy and the Tea Party see the current functioning of the state as oppressive and perceive themselves to be dominated by the central state power. However, Occupy participants seek to eliminate the state and the notion of compulsion by the state whereas Tea Party participants seek to devolve the power of compulsion over others to the local level. Tea Party participants did not indicate any qualms with the notion of using state power (which ultimately implies the use of violence), but instead preferred that power to be exercised locally and by people elected to power fairly. This focus on reforming rather than eliminating state power is demonstrated by Thomas' work on elections with True the Vote and Lloyd's organization of volunteers to review state legislation.

The interviews with Occupy participants support Harcourt's assertion that Occupy is practicing what he terms "political disobedience" rather than "civil disobedience" (Harcourt 2013). Steve was the most in favor of organized revolution, seeking to use mass cooperation to bring down the current government, but every Occupy participant expressed a disdain for the current system and an unwillingness to accept the authority of that system. Even John, who referred to himself as an "institutionalist," nevertheless felt that the current institutions were corrupt. He believes in the value of institutions generally but not necessarily those that are currently in place. Matteo, Mickey, Felix, and Karen also expressed their views that the current central state power was bereft of authority by virtue of the fact that it did not adequately

represent the people. This perception of a lack of representation with regard to self-determination also supports part of Nugent's assertion that "the breakdown of the integrity of political life" helped motivate and sustain the Occupy movement (Nugent 2012).

At the core of the responses I received from both groups was the deeply-held perception that the status quo is unsustainable with regard to the quality of life in the United States and elsewhere – and this perception is so strong as to move these individuals to participate in collective action. Most of the participants explained that they had never been particularly active in politics prior to their participation in the Tea Party and Occupy movements, indicating that a confluence of variables coalesced in such a way as to instigate their participation. The participants in this study were universally serious and passionate about both their perceptions of the problems in society and their ideas for how to mitigate or eliminate those problems. Whereas many people perceive problems in the world around them but are not motivated to act, the participants I interviewed responded to the cultural context in which they found themselves embedded and sought ways to transform their existential concerns into concrete action.

Significance and Areas for Future Study

Action is not a virtue in-and-of-itself. Participants from both groups derive their ideas of an ideal society from their unique perspectives and experiences. Yet what constitutes an ideal society to some might represent social catastrophe to others. The Occupy and Tea Party participants interviewed for this study are working towards their goals for social change but do not exist in a vacuum. The United States consists of a myriad of individuals and groups with overlapping concerns and desires, and the resulting culture of social organization emerges from this cacophony of intersecting and often conflicting worldviews. The results of this study

provide additional insight into the worldviews of Occupy and Tea Party members and can serve as a reference point for future researchers who will be positioned to evaluate how much or how little each group has accomplished towards achieving their goals for social change.

Despite the limited scope of this study, these interviews and the resulting analysis increase our understanding of the goals and strategies for both Occupy and the Tea Party. The interviews demonstrate that at least some members of each group perceive themselves to be oppressed by centralized power and therefore seek to shift a significant portion of that power closer to the local level. The interviews also provide a glimpse into the varied strategies for social organization pursued by Occupy members who famously did not have specific demands during the occupations in late 2011.

An avenue of future research likely to yield useful conclusions would be long-term ethnographic study of a local chapter of one or more of these groups. This would allow for a better understanding of the consistency of their asserted ideals for social organization as it pertains to how they live and work in their communities. This study helps illuminate what some of those ideals were, but could not determine how closely each participant's lived actions conform to their stated ideals.

The strategy of asking participants to envision their ideal society proved useful as it encouraged participants to think in terms of how they ultimately envision society should function as opposed to speaking strictly to what they see as negative in the current social paradigm. Even those participants who asserted that they could not envision an ideal society nevertheless spoke to the basic requirements they viewed as necessary to achieve one. It would be beneficial to employ this or a similar strategy on a significantly larger scale involving a broader cross-section of society (in the United States or elsewhere). For example, interviewing members of society

who do not belong to either Occupy or the Tea Party would provide important additional context to compare how divergent the views of members of these groups are from non-members.

Finally, a larger sample size employing a random sample would allow for any resulting analysis to be more representative of each group analyzed. Ultimately, were funding available, a project designed to collect ideas about the ideal society from a random sample of people around the world would add greatly to the academic literature about the similarities and differences between the preferred mechanisms of social organization of people from different nations and cultures.

APPENDICES

Guiding Questions for Semi-Structured Interview

Each informant will be asked the following general question to begin the interview:

"How would you organize U.S. society given no limitations imposed by social or cultural

standards other than those you place on yourself?"

The following guiding questions will be asked as needed:

- What would be important to you in an ideal society?
- What values do you think are important? How would you promote these values?
- What role, if any, does government have in an ideal society?
- In an ideal society, what is the relationship between people and the government?
- In an ideal society, what is the relationship between the individual and the community?
- What are the requirements, if any, for citizenship in an ideal society?
- What would be the first step towards shifting the current society to the ideal society you have described?

Demographic Questionnaire

Age:

Gender:

Religious/spiritual identification, if any (list all that apply):

Ethnic identification, if any (list all that apply):

How strongly do you identify with your ethnic identity?
Not at all   ①   ②   ③   ④   ⑤   *Strongly*

Highest level of education completed:
- ◯ High school or equivalent
- ◯ Vocational/technical school
- ◯ Some college
- ◯ Bachelor's degree
- ◯ Master's degree
- ◯ Doctoral degree
- ◯ Professional degree (MD, JD, etc)
- ◯ Other:

Highest level of education completed by parents or caregivers:
- ◯ High school or equivalent
- ◯ Vocational/technical school
- ◯ Some college
- ◯ Bachelor's degree
- ◯ Master's degree
- ◯ Doctoral degree
- ◯ Professional degree (MD, JD, etc)
- ◯ Other:

Household income
- ◯ Under $10,000
- ◯ $10,000 - $19,999
- ◯ $20,000 - $29,999
- ◯ $30,000 - $39,999
- ◯ $40,000 - $49,999
- ◯ $50,000 - $74,999
- ◯ $75,000 - $99,999
- ◯ $100,000 - $150,000
- ◯ Over $150,000

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