Moral Majorities:
The Rhetoric of "Real" American Values in Contemporary Conservatism

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ABSTRACT

Americans have witnessed continuous assaults on the rules and norms structuring our democracy for almost a decade. Much of the blame for these attacks is attributed to former president Donald Trump, in part because of his role in encouraging the insurrection on January 6, 2021. In this thesis, I argue that Donald Trump's presidency, and the violent insurrection it culminated in, were made possible by the Tea Party movement of late 2000s and early 2010s. Using Lakoff's (2002) concept of moral politics, I examine four books published between 2010-2012 by national figures who embraced the Tea Party moniker. This thesis identifies common rhetorical strategies across these books and compares them to strategies in two of former President Trump's speeches. I find that all five individuals premise their arguments for conservatism on an amalgamation of morality and patriotism. The conflation of belief in a particular set of moral values with what it means to be American allows these figures to designate themselves as "real" Americans. This frame contributed to further political polarization between "us" and "them." Over time, it encouraged readers and listeners to ignore and overrule the will of the opposite party because they are not "real" Americans. We are living through the effects of the extremism that culminated on January 6, 2021, but we cannot hope to repair our democracy without first understanding its causes.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how public figures associated with the Tea Party movement used rhetoric to create and perpetuate ideas about who "real" Americans are, what they believe, and how they should act. I analyze books by Sarah Palin, Newt Gingrich, Glenn Beck, and Jenny Beth Martin to demonstrate how they premise "real" American identity on whether or not individuals are perceived to hold a particular set of moral values and beliefs. I ultimately suggest that their rhetorical strategies primed the American public for anti-democratic rhetoric and led to the election of Donald Trump.

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Introduction

A Movement Begins at the Bubble

The housing bubble burst caused by subprime mortgages and the subsequent collapse of investment giants Lehman Brothers and Bear Sterns in 2008 led to a crisis in the interconnected global economy. This series of events forced outgoing President George W. Bush and his administration to pass the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, which created the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP).[1] TARP allocated $444 billion to support financial institutions and the automotive industry to prevent a collapse that would have further destabilized the economy. In the eyes of the public, however, TARP was broadly seen as a bailout for the same institutions that had created the crisis (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). When the newly elected President Obama and a Democratic Congress passed another bill, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), designed to support the economy and prevent further disruption, some became enraged by what they viewed as irresponsible spending by Washington. These individuals were angry despite the fact that ARRA included tax cuts for the middle class, funding for much-needed infrastructure projects that would, in turn, create jobs, and funds for states and localities to support education, Medicare expansion, and transportation projects.[2] These programs were designed to help the same people angry about TARP bailouts. The hostility to these programs came from those who believed that the government and the public should simply "tighten their belts" and behave more responsibly.

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[1] Congressional Budget Office. 2023. "Report on the Troubled Asset Relief Program-April 2023." 59062. TARP. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Budget Office.

[2] Congressional Budget Office. 2012. "Estimated Impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act on Employment and Economic Output from October 2011 Through December 2011." 4435. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Budget Office.

This sentiment reached a critical mass on February 19, 2009, when Rick Santelli, reporting from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, proclaimed that by passing stimulus packages, the government was promoting "bad behavior" (Santelli 2009). Santelli claimed that Americans did not want to support the "losers' mortgages" because no one wants to support their neighbor who has an "extra bathroom and can't afford their mortgage" (Santelli 2009). Some claim that Santelli used "dog whistle" terms to express racist and bigoted beliefs without saying them outright (Haney-López 2014; Hughey and Parks 2014). Santelli's use of the word "loser" implies that he is talking about a specific group of individuals who are incapable of behaving "appropriately" and making intelligent financial decisions. By calling these individuals "losers," Santelli is also creating a dynamic of us versus them. *They* are the losers who make bad choices while *we* are the winners who have to bail them out.

Santelli proposes a "Chicago Tea Party" for "all you capitalists who want to show up to Lake Michigan" (Santelli 2009). Santelli's reference to the 1773 Boston Tea Party, during which colonists threw crates of tea into the Boston Harbor to protest taxes imposed by the British, drew viewers' attention, and his rant soon went viral. The symbolism invoked by the Tea Party was a perfect rallying cry because it signified "authentic patriotism" and had "visceral meaning to people who [felt] that the United States as they [had] known it was slipping away" (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 7). Individuals who participated in Tea Party rallies often expressed a desire to "take their country back" (Skocpol and Williamson 2012), though from whom was not always expressed. Thus, while the Tea Party movement ostensibly arose as a response to government spending following the 2008 financial crisis, it actually expressed much deeper ideas about what constitutes a "real" American and what values the country should hold. The concept of "taking

our country back," as I will show, was reflected at the time by politicians aligned with the movement and continues to be invoked in the current political moment.

As part of this effort, Tea Partiers worked to monopolize "the symbols of legitimacy" (Hunter 1991, 147). That is, they portrayed themselves as defenders of the Constitution, among other American traditions, to paint the political left as undermining the country's system of values and beliefs. During Tea Party rallies during the late 2000s and early 2010s, protesters held up copies of the Constitution in protest (Palin 2010), calling for lower taxes and smaller government. The success of earlier attempts to monopolize symbols of patriotism and tradition culminated in the events of January 6th, 2021. Over time, conservative extremists created the conditions in which it was possible to engage in insurrection while claiming to protect the Constitution. By associating themselves with symbols such as the Constitution while simultaneously claiming that the opposition actively undermines our founding documents, this form of conservatism has further political polarization and contributed to ideas about what constitutes a "real" American.

These protests on January 6th, 2021, though ostensibly rooted in the Constitution, were based on a different idea of constitutionality–the power of a few men who claimed to know what was in the best interests of "the people." In his calls for Vice President Pence to overturn the election, former President Trump claimed that: "He has the absolute right to do it." because "We're supposed to protect our country, support our country, support our Constitution, and protect our Constitution" (Trump 2021). These claims of respecting and protecting the Constitution, from both the Tea Party and President Trump, reflect a sense of morality associated with adherence to the Constitution. These moral claims do not need to be rooted in the constitutionality of a given action; they need only to reflect a morality projected onto the

founding document itself. Donald Trump's rhetoric on January 6th, 2021, ultimately drew on the rhetoric used by Tea Party politicians, activists, and supporters.

Constitutions are idealistic; they express desires, commands, or wishes and bestow these upon the body they govern (Burke 1969). In doing so, they create an ideal that while often out of reach, gives the country a common purpose. The ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are subjective. To whom they apply and to what extent remains a point of contention. Yet when those in power exacerbate these contentions, they undermine our shared commitment to these ideals. This project, then, explores how moral rhetoric has been used

In an article in *The Atlantic*, David Brooks recently argued that the fraying moral fabric of our culture has contributed to increasing political polarization (2023). Brooks (2023) writes that "Politics appears to give people a sense of righteousness: A person's moral stature is based not on their conduct, but on their location on the political spectrum." As our country tries to account for repeated assaults on our democracy, we are forced to face how our various conceptions of morality have been manipulated to threaten the very thing that binds us to one another–a shared commitment to the ideals described by our Founding Fathers over 200 years ago.

Problem Statement

In this study, I ask: How did Tea Party activists and Tea Party-aligned politicians use moral rhetoric to appeal to voters? How did the Tea Party's use of moral rhetoric alter the Republican Party's rhetoric? More specifically, these questions will attend to the metaphors used to denote morality and the discursive choices made by the authors that denote morality at the word and sentence levels. The study hopes to account for how politicians who aligned themselves with the Tea Party used moral rhetoric to express ideas about who "real" Americans

are and the values they hold. I examine moral rhetoric and how the Tea Party movement influenced American politics. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate how the Tea Party's rhetoric led to changes in the Republican Party's rhetoric. The rise of Donald Trump would not have been possible if not for Tea Party conservatives (Pew Research Center 2019), making the need to understand the Tea Party's moral rhetoric vital to understanding the current state of our democracy.

My research follows Asen's argument that rhetorical "scholarship offers important lessons that may be more apparent to researchers in other fields and aspiring rhetorical scholars if we [rhetoricians] explicitly consider the critical import of our case studies" (2010, 125). In Octalog IV, Skinnell argued that "We have much to learn about–and from–bad people speaking effectively in the history of rhetoric. We are called by the times we live in to learn those historical lessons" (Hurley 2021, 339).

Scope and Limitations

I attempt to show how Tea Party-affiliated figures use rhetoric to distinguish between "real" Americans who share commitment to a particular set of moral values and beliefs about America from "fake" or "not real" Americans who do not share those beliefs. However, this thesis cannot—and does not—account for the many factors that influence American politics. This work also does not account for the rise of far-right movements in other countries around the world. The rise of other far-right movements could be an indication that contemporary political discourse is influenced by other rhetorical strategies and frameworks. Moreover, my focus on morality, using Lakoff's (2002) theory, does not account for the differences between morals and values.

Methodology

The primary texts used in this analysis are *Cowards* (Beck 2012), *America By Heart* (Palin 2010), *To Save America* (Gingrich and DeSantis 2010), and *Tea Party Patriots* (Meckler and Martin 2012). These texts were chosen because they were written by nationally recognized figures who espoused Tea Party-esque rhetoric in books published between 2010 and 2012. These texts by Sarah Palin, Newt Gingrich, Glenn Beck, and Jenny Beth Martin represent the three factions associated with the Tea Party: rhetoric of political figures, national organizations, and the media.

Case Study and Background

While these individuals are no longer at the forefront of American politics, they each played role in shaping contemporary conservatism. Sarah Palin served as the first female governor of Alaska from 2006-2009 and was selected as Senator John McCain's vice-presidential running mate for the 2008 presidential election. Despite McCain's loss to Obama, Palin became a widely popular of right-wing resentment and fire-brand politics, with speculation that she might run for president in 2012 (Green 2011). Palin was the keynote speaker at the 2010 National Tea Party Convention (Palin 2010). She endorsed Donald Trump prior to the 2016 Republican president primary elections in Iowa (Palin 2016). Newt Gingrich was served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1979-1999, served as Speaker of the House from 1995-1999, and was an unsuccessful candidate for the 2012 Republican presidential primary (United States Congress). He is recognized as pioneering the contemporary style of partisan combat (Coppins 2018) that now constitutes American politics. Together, Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich constitute the political faction of the Tea Party movement.

Lesser known, but still influential figures, are Glenn Beck and Jenny Beth Martin who respectively represent the media and national Tea Party organizations. Beck began working as a

talk radio host in 2001 and continues to produce daily radio shows and podcast episodes (Glenn Beck n.d.). He has also hosted a daily television show on Fox News from 2008-2011, drawing an audience of roughly two million each night (Beck n.d.). Recent episodes of the Glenn Beck Podcast include titles such as, "Christian Scientist DESTROYS Darwin, Provides PROOF of God" (Beck 2024a) and "Is the Global Cabal a Conspiracy Theory?" (Beck 2024b). Beck refused to endorse Trump in 2016 citing a danger to the Constitution, despite the fact that his doomsday rhetoric paved the way for Trump's rise (Beinart 2017). More recently, however, Beck seems to have made peace with Donald Trump. In an August 2023 interview with Trump, Beck asked if Trump regretted not locking Clinton up after the 2016 election and, if he were to become president again, whether he would lock people up (Griffing 2023). To this, Trump responded that he would "have no choice because they're doing it to us" (Griffing 2023). Regardless of his personal feelings toward Donald Trump, it is clear that Beck's conspiracy-laden, fatalistic take on politics was, and continues to be, an influential force in conservative politics by shaping voters' perceptions of issues and invoking fear.

While Beck remains a popular figure in the conservative media ecosystem, Jenny Beth Martin, who represents national organizations affiliated with the Tea Party movement, has far less relevant in national politics. Along with Martin Meckler, she co-founded the Tea Party Patriots, a national organization that envisions "a nation where individual liberty is cherished and maximized, where the Constitution is revered and upheld, and where Americans are free to pursue their American Dream" (Tea Party Patriots n.d.). As founder and national coordinator of Tea Party Patriots, she endorsed Donald Trump in 2016, 2020, and most recently in the 2024 presidential election (Martin 2016; Martin 2020; Martin 2024). Although Martin is not well-known in national politics, her founding of the Tea Party Patriots and its support of Donald

Trump demonstrate the ways in which the Tea Party movement's positions have evolved in a way that aligns with conservative politics more broadly.

While scholarship on Tea Party rhetoric has focused on speeches or social media posts, I believe these books represent world views. Each text lays out the individual's political beliefs and proposes arguments for why the Tea Party agenda is best for American politics. Moreover, each book draws on similar themes of the founding principles, American values, and the author's vision for the country. For these authors, drawing upon language in founding documents serves two purposes. First, it is part of their self-identification with the Tea Party movement's because, while the movement ostensibly focused on economic conservatism, the cultural world of the Tea Party utilized broad themes of patriotism and history, political and cultural fundamentalism, and emotional registers of indignation and mistrust (Westermeyer 2019b). Second, by referring to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Federalist Papers, and other historical documents, these books monopolize the symbols of legitimacy (Hunter 1991). This allows them to depict their values and politics as part of a defense of the "institutions and traditions of American life while depicting the opposition as the foes" (Hunter 1991, 147). By monopolizing symbols associated with patriotism and tradition, conservatives aligned with the Tea Party movement portray themselves and their supporters as "real" Americans. Moreover, by monopolizing patriotic symbols and manipulating them to align with a particular set of values, they essentially erase the difference between these founding documents and the values associated with the party they have been monopolized by. This, in turn, allows that party to use those documents in support of whatever cause they choose, regardless of whether or not it actually aligns with the content and principles of those documents.

Themes of Patriotism and Tradition

It has become common for politicians to publish books prior to announcing their candidacy, even though many of those books sell relatively poorly (McGill 2015; Rubin 2013). Other political figures use books to outline their ideas in greater detail for their core audience. While detractors contend that these books are rarely read, they constitute a part of the increasingly insulated political media ecosystem. Books allow politicians and public figures to present a narrative oriented toward a particular audience willing to accept their claims. While scholars in rhetoric traditionally focus on political speeches (Murphy 2009; Rhodes and Hlavacik 2015; Medhurst 2009) by examining *Cowards* (Beck 2012)*, America By Heart* (Palin 2010)*, To Save America* (Gingrich 2010), and *Tea Party Patriots* (Meckler and Martin 2012), I hope to demonstrate how political books might reveal new insight into the nature of political discourse.

If, as Lakoff (2002) and Haidt (2012; Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009) propose, morality is central to understanding an individual's political orientation–including how they understand the world, the stories they tell themselves about their world, and the politicians they align themselves with–then understanding morality is central to understanding democracy. Richard Burke (1982) proposed that American politics is best conceived as rhetoric, not morality or force. According to Burke, America's heterogeneity makes it difficult to extend moral agreements in politics further than the "moral value of avoiding coercion" (1982, 50). While I do not dispute this argument, I would argue that aspiring politicians call upon the "silent majority" by using moral appeals, thereby moving them to act. The Tea Party used rhetoric to galvanize the support of those who shared moral values. Thus, the Tea Party represents Burke's (1982) conception of politics as rhetoric *and* Lakoff's (2002) and Haidt's (2012; Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009) argument that politics is based appeals to the voter's sense of morality.

Moral Politics

The foundation of *Moral Politics*, in which Lakoff proposes that American politics can be understood through the metaphor of the family, with the government in the position of the parent, arises out of the foundational metaphors proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1981) in *Metaphors We Live By*. Lakoff and Johnson (1981, 1) write, "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language, but in thought and action." They argue that metaphors structure our conceptual system, which in turn dictates how we think, act, and understand the world; our concepts structure "what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people" (Lakoff and Johnson 1981, 1). The metaphors that structure our conceptual system are intimately tied to the values of the culture they are developed in. This means our values must be coherent with the "metaphorical concepts we live by" (Lakoff and Johnson 1981, 22). Our values are intimately tied to our morals, so "much of moral reasoning is metaphorical reasoning" (Lakoff 2002, 5). The metaphors that structure our conceptual systems are innately connected to the social systems in which we are raised. Therefore, the metaphors that inform an individual's worldview also inform their conception of morality.

Lakoff (2002) clarifies that his central concern is public discourse about politics, and how America has failed to understand and discuss politics and morality accurately. Since metaphorical concepts structure our thinking, they also govern how we communicate with one another and perceive the world (Lakoff and Johnson 1981). According to Lakoff (2002, 385): "There are no neutral concepts and no neutral language for expressing political positions within a moral context." Language cannot be neutral, and because of that, the language we use to talk about politics exposes the moral concepts that structure our understanding of the world.

Therefore, the public must understand how our conceptual systems influence our understanding of politics.

Within this metaphor, liberals and conservatives have different understandings about the role of parents. Liberals constitute the Nurturant Parent model, while conservatives subscribe to the Strict Father model (Lakoff 2002). These models are related to an individual's unconscious conception of family-based morality, which structures how an individual understands politics. Lakoff's (2002) analysis outlines the moral ideals for both models and then applies them to specific areas of public policy, such as environmental regulation and taxes. In doing so, he elucidates how, even when conservative policy ideas seem inconsistent, they align with the model of Strict Father morality, which constitutes the conservative worldview (Lakoff 2002).

The Strict Father model "takes as background the view that life is difficult and that the world is fundamentally dangerous" (Lakoff 2002, 65). It is based around a traditional nuclear family with a father whose primary role is supporting and protecting the family and having authority within the household. This father sets strict rules for children's behavior and enforces them through punishment; he believes that children should never be coddled, or they will become spoiled, meaning they will never become independent or learn appropriate morals (Lakoff 2002). The Strict Father model structures the understanding that if you are obedient, you will become self-disciplined, and one can only succeed if they are self-disciplined (Lakoff 2002). Success, therefore, is a "sign of having been obedient and having become self-disciplined. Success is a just reward for acting within this moral system. This makes success moral" (Lakoff 2002, 68). This system of thought is governed by the understanding that, while children *should* be obedient and self-disciplined, they do not always behave this way. Since success is the reward

for adhering to this moral system, failure to succeed must be the result of insufficient adherence to the moral system.

Strict Father morality is organized by a set of metaphors which structure the conceptual system (Lakoff 2002). The most relevant metaphors for this inquiry are moral strength, which contributes to the dichotomy between good and evil; moral authority, or notions about the "legitimacy and illegitimacy of moral authority" and contributes to resentment towards meddling authorities; moral order, which structures hierarchical power relations; moral essence, or the idea that there is an "essence" of character which past actions can determine and will dictate future actions; moral purity, which contributes to the idea that morality must be "unified and uniform"; and moral self-interest, or the idea that "seeking one's self-interest is a moral activity and interfering with the seeking of self-interest is immoral" (Lakoff 2002, 100-101). These metaphors, which structure Strict Father morality, can be used in various ways to explain conservative worldviews and policy proposals.

There are, however, different categories of moral action that make up the conservative moral system, which Lakoff outlines as:

1. Promoting Strict Father morality in general.
2. Promoting self-discipline, responsibility, and self-reliance.
3. Upholding the Morality of Reward and Punishment
    a. Preventing interference with the pursuit of self-interest by self-disciplined, self-reliant people.
    b. Promoting punishment as a means of upholding our authority.
    c. Insuring punishment for lack of self-discipline.
4. Protecting moral people from external evils.

5. Upholding the Moral Order. (Lakoff 2002, 163)

These categories of moral action, while greatly simplified, provide an outline for understanding conservative thought and action. Within these categories, raising taxes on the richest members of society is considered immoral in the conservative conceptual system because they are the "model citizens, those who, through self-discipline and hard work, have achieved the American dream" (Lakoff 2002, 189). The rich are considered self-disciplined and self-reliant; they accumulate wealth in pursuit of their own self-interest, and interfering with this is immoral. According to Lakoff, the conservative model citizen has and supports conservative values, is self-disciplined and self-reliant, upholds the morality of reward and punishment, works to protect moral citizens, and acts in support of the moral order (Lakoff 2002). Therefore, raising taxes on the rich, who conservatives consider to be model citizens, is a transgression of the categories of moral action. Conservative model citizens hold the "traditional" American values that Gingrich (2010), among others, so often references.

Moral Politics (Lakoff 2002), while foundational to this study, exhibits a clear bias for liberalism and the Nurturant Parent Model and fails to acknowledge that permissiveness and unconditional support also have the potential to cause harm (Pinker and Lakoff 2007). Pinker's (2007) critique points out several weaknesses, including the fact that Lakoff encourages liberals not to engage with conservatives through the presentation of facts or appeals to truth, but solely through forcing particular metaphors and frames. Recognizing this weakness, I use Lakoff's (2002) work as an entry point towards understanding the frames and metaphors that govern conservative thought. Simultaneously, I try to show how the texts in this case study misconstrue or reframe facts and anecdotes to support their claims. My goal is to understand how the texts in

this case study appeal to elements of the Strict Father conceptual system without lapsing into the bias and coercion that Pinker (Pinker and Lakoff 2007) identifies.

Thesis Structure

In the first chapter, I review relevant literature, identifying broad themes attributed to the Tea Party's motivation and unifying values. While scholars have conducted broad research on the movement, relatively few scholars have examined how its rhetoric differed from or shaped the modern Republican party. I also discuss how research conducted by scholars in disciplines outside of rhetoric can provide alternative perspectives on the motives and beliefs driving the Tea Party movement, many of which furnish valuable insights for my own work. The second chapter analyzes the themes of *Tea Party Patriots* (Meckler and Martin 2012) and *Cowards* (Beck 2010). I find that while Meckler and Martin (2012) ostensibly focus on economic themes, their policy proposals are deeply imbued with moral assumptions. Beck (2012), however, is hardly concerned with fiscal matters or policy debates, and instead deals with issues such as education and immigration. Beck's (2010) arguments, while purportedly economic, betray a culture war agenda that he argues is related to the Tea Party movement. Chapter Three then examines how *America By Heart* (Palin 2010) and *To Save America* (Gingrich 2010) reflect the themes identified in chapter two. While both Palin (2010) and Gingrich (Gingrich 2010) published their books prior to Beck (2012) and Meckler and Martin (2012), the organization of these chapters demonstrates how politicians absorbed and refracted ideas expressed by the Tea Party.

Chapter One

Literature Review

The rise of the Tea Party and its subsequent high-water mark in the 2010 midterm elections raised questions about a new kind of conservatism that seemed to be appearing in the GOP. Scholarship agrees on the three major factors that contributed to the Tea Party's rise: (1) a confluence of grassroots activism, (2) national funders and free-market groups with an influence in remaking the Republican party, and (3) conservative media hosts combined to provide legitimacy to the movement (Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Elliott 2017; Westermeyer 2019a). There are a few notable exceptions to this consensus. In 2009, Krugman, writing in the *New York Times*, argued that the Tea Party was an "AstroTurf" movement created by national conservative political organizations and promoted by prominent media figures such as Rush Limbaugh. Street and DiMaggio (2016) echo this sentiment, contending that the Tea Party was funded by the Koch brothers and organized by establishment Republicans intent on returning their party to power. While Krugman (2009) and Street and DiMaggio (2016) correctly recognize the role played by national organizations and the conservative media ecosystem, this analysis presents a simplistic conclusion that discounts local Tea Party groups and their leaders. Skocpol and Williamson (2012) point out that, although Tea Partiers overwhelmingly vote Republican, they do not necessarily identify themselves as such, often preferring the term "Independent" (27). The Republican label carries baggage for Tea Party members, who often distrust "establishment" Republicans and the GOP elites (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 27). While Tea Partiers might exist within the orbit of the GOP, they are not strictly "Republican," and identifying them as such provides a convenient reason for discounting the movement.

Among those who agree that the Tea Party was a confluence of grassroots organizing, national political groups, and conservative media personalities who gave the movement legitimacy, scholars largely agree that Rick Santelli's rant on CNBC marked the inception of what became known as the Tea Party (Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Haney-López 2014). However, there is meaningful disagreement about the dissatisfaction in the American public that led to the movement's rise, power, and ultimate transformation of the Republican Party. The explanations for the rise of the Tea Party can be broadly divided into two groups. The first contends that racial hostility was largely, if not entirely, responsible. The second argues that while racism may have played a role, other forms of discontent also contributed to the movement's coalescence.

Within the group that attributes racism as the Tea Party's unifying value, there is disagreement about the methods and manifestations of this racism. Haney-López (2014) contends that the Tea Party's fury stemmed from racial hostilities mobilized by dog whistle politics, or coded appeals that operate on two levels: inaudible and easily denied in one range yet stimulating strong reactions in another. This argument centers on the fact that conservatives have used racial pandering over the last 50 years to win support from white voters for policies that favor the wealthy and wreck the middle class. This strategy manifested itself in the Tea Party's protection of Social Security and Medicare while maintaining resentment towards the government based on the idea that their taxes were wasted on undeserving minorities (Haney-López 2014). Parker (2014) contends, instead, that Tea Party supporters were driven by an "anxiety they feel as they perceive the America they know, the country they love, slipping away, threatened by the rapidly changing face of what they believe is the 'real' America" (3). In this view, the Tea Party was the latest manifestation of national right-wing reactionary movements,

similar to the rise of the Klu Klux Klan or the John Birch Society (Parker 2014). Hughey and Parks (2014) find that racial animus towards Obama was integral to the rise of the Tea Party and the Birther movement.

The second group attributes the Tea Party's rise to various reasons, including but not limited to racial hostility, and often cites economic concerns as a part of the group's formation. Deckman (2017) contends that the Tea Party was mobilized by values such as reducing the federal debt, lowering taxes, and promoting American exceptionalism, or the idea that America's values, political system, and history are unique and worthy of universal admiration" (Walt 2011). However, given the diverse array of Tea Party-affiliated groups, differences emerge, with some organizations focusing on economic issues and others merging social and economic concerns (Deckman 2017). Westermeyer (2019a) argues that the cultural world of the Tea Party consists of three broad themes: patriotism and history, political and cultural fundamentalism, and emotional registers of indignation and mistrust. Johnson (2013) finds something similar, claiming that the Tea Party uses melancholic populism to recall a past way of life that has begun to dissipate in light of a changing country. Skocpol and Williamson (2012) also find the Tea Party to be the most recent incarnation of American conservative populism and part of a long-standing conservative tradition to celebrate their conservative political forebears. While different in some respects, these themes outline the Tea Party's focus on a mythic past constituted by a specific, yet ambiguous, set of values and beliefs.

While much of the Tea Party's belief system is centered on traditional values, their politics are a product of the social and political movements of the early twenty-first century (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Skocpol and Williamson (2012) concede that coded racism is part of the movement but argue that it cannot be viewed without the context of the Great

Recession and larger societal shifts. Burke (2015) finds that the Tea Party's success depended on long-stabilized ideas about class, race, and gender in the United States, mainly tapping into mainstream ideologies to advance its political goals. Though there is no consensus on the rise of the Tea Party, it is clear that traditional economic themes reflected Tea Party supporters' more considerable worries about their way of life and "traditional" values. As I demonstrate, Palin (2010) and Meckler and Martin (2012) both use discussions of economic policy and fiscal responsibility as a mechanism to argue for a return to "better" times and a specific way of life.

Media Coverage and Legitimacy

As previously stated, the rise of the Tea Party and its culmination in the 2010 midterm elections has been attributed to the influence of grassroots organizing, the impact of large political donors attempting to reshape the Republican Party, and the media's attention to and legitimization of the movement. These forces did not work independently. Instead, national organizations funded by political donors used local and grassroots organizing to promote their cause. The increasing prevalence of the Internet during this period also contributed to the grassroots nature of the movement, allowing local leaders to organize meetings and research political and legislative processes (Deckman 2017; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). These groups were often loosely associated with national organizations such as FreedomWorks, the Tea Party Patriots, and the Tea Party Express (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Media organizations, particularly right-wing news platforms like Fox News and the *National Review* also provided a platform for the Tea Party to spread its message (Skocpol and Williamson 2012; Parker 2014; Johnson 2013; Scacco, Weaver, and Wiemer 2021). Costley White (2018) has argued that the Tea Party was less of a social movement and more of a mass-mediated brand facilitated, organized, and constructed by the national press. This claim holds that the Tea Party became a

national story because it was produced by and within the national press, not only because of its constituencies and organizers (Costley White 2018). There is no consensus among scholars on the influence that grassroots organizing, national groups and large donors, and the media have had on the success of the Tea Party. While it is primarily attributed to grassroots organizations, the degree to which national groups and media outlets played a role in the movement's success remains unclear.

In an analysis of nightly cable news programs that compared and contrasted coverage of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement and the Tea Party, Scacco, Weaver, and Wiemer (2021) found that Fox News, more than other cable news outlets, marginalized OWS while simultaneously boosting Tea Party legitimacy through inverse echo framing. That is, news coverage that "(1) highlighted perceived media hypocrisy, (2) called attention to double standards in marginalization of movements, and (3) countered attempts by OWS activists and allies to cast equivalency between the two movements" (Scacco, Weaver, and Wiemer 2021, 84). They conclude that Fox News marginalized OWS in a way consistent with other mainstream news outlets. Still, the use of inverse echo framing with the Tea Party may have failed to positively legitimize the conservative cause among sections of the public (Scacco, Weaver, Wiemer 2021). Similarly, in an analysis of televised Republican congressional campaign advertisements between 2006 and 2014, Neiheisel (2016) found that Tea Party-endorsed candidates rarely used the Tea Party label for themselves in ads. Instead, the study found that these candidates were both more likely to engage in attacks on the liberal label and less likely to invoke the conservative label than non-Tea Party-endorsed Republican candidates (Neiheisel 2016). These findings provide evidence that, on a national media level, the Tea Party can be

understood less as a movement independent of the Republican Party than as a movement *within* the Republican Party that sought to reshape the party itself.

Grassroots Organizing

The importance of grassroots organizing in the Tea Party's success is not contested among scholars. Its success was framed as a source of wonder and fascination for those attempting to understand the movement. Skocpol and Williamson (2012) interviewed thousands of local organizers and organization members. Their work, perhaps the most thorough documentation of Tea Party members, showed that longtime conservatives dominated the Tea Party. While some were new to political activism, many had previous experience (Skocpol and Williams 2012). According to Skocpol and Williamson,

> Men and women involved in Tea Party activism tend to be people who have held leadership positions in other community organizations, whether on the local library board or directing a community nonprofit. The Tea Party is simply a new venue to apply previously honed skills, just as it is yet another channel through which to express deep-seated conservative values. (2012, 42)

The previous experience with civic engagement undoubtedly contributed to the grassroots success of the Tea Party. And, as Gena Bell, a local Tea Party activist, says in the Washington Post that organizing for the Tea Party is "'like being a Girl Scout mom'" (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 95). Braunstein (2017) notes the Tea Party used the language of civil discourse that valorized the qualities associated with active citizenship and civil, religious discourse that held active participation in American democracy as sacred. For them, active citizenship was about becoming more informed or engaged in the political process and injecting their moral values into public political debates (Braunstein 2017).

Deckman notes that the fluid and decentralized nature of the movement allowed female Tea Party organizers and activists to "engage in conservative activism on their terms" (2017, 11). The prevalence of social media has also allowed women to emerge as leaders in the Tea Party. The diffuse network of Tea Party-affiliated groups allowed women to act as political entrepreneurs or find a place within organizations that best meet their political goals, also in ways often aided by social media (Deckman 2017). Among Republican-identifying women, members of the Tea Party are slightly more likely to be stay-at-home mothers and attend church regularly than non-Tea Party Republican women (Deckman 2017). While Deckman does not explicitly address civic participation among Tea Party women, the prevalence of full-time homemakers and religious devotion indicates a higher level of civic participation, similar to that which Skocpol and Williamson address.

Tea Party supporters are more likely to be older, more educated, and middle or upper class than the average American. Because of this, Parker (2014) argues that they have more at stake in the political system and more to gain and lose. Survey results indicate that Tea Party supporters were likelier to express an interest in politics, attend political meetings, and vote in the 2010 midterm election than non-Tea Party supporters (Parker 2014). Even within those who identified themselves as conservatives, Tea Party supporters voted in the 2010 midterms at higher rates, were much more likely to have attended a political meeting in the past 12 months and were more interested in the news than non-Tea Party conservatives (Parker 2014). Again, while these results do not directly translate to higher overall civic participation, there are indications that Tea Party conservatives are more likely to be engaged in civic non-political involvement at higher rates.

Westermeyer (2019a) argues that grassroots Tea Party groups formed deep and complex interpersonal relationships and processes which helped make the movement effective. Through dialogic and collaborative processes, local Tea Party groups negotiated meanings and explored possibilities in a way that "injected dynamism and improvisation into the social movement" (Westermeyer 2019a, 170). At the personal level, there was widespread and active "identity work" undertaken by everyday organizers who sought to connect the complexities of an individual's life history and experiences to the meaning of the Tea Party movement (Westermeyer 2019a). The Tea Party, in this sense, provided a meaning system and interpretative fame by helping people make connections between the movement and their broader understanding of the culture (Westermeyer 2019b). Specifically, participants cite worries about the decline of traditional relationships, religion, and patriotic values as their reasons for Tea Party activism, often connecting these stories to memories and experiences from their own life. This system of meaning and identity framing allowed individuals to connect deeply with Tea Party values, providing activists with a more profound commitment to the movement than otherwise.

Tea Party Rhetoric

While much has been written about the Tea Party, there is limited research on the Tea Party's rhetoric, particularly how it differed from traditional conservative rhetoric at the time. Moreover, though elements of morality appear within arguments made by Tea Party supporters, and these elements are necessarily translated into scholarship, the focus on morality-specific claims made by the Tea Party is nonexistent. Though, as previously noted, social conservatives made up a vocal part of the movement's coalition, morality is usually confined in the research to focus on economic issues and taxes. As we know now, the Tea Party's role in reshaping the

Republican Party has certainly influenced its rhetoric, particularly the centrality of moral claims within the party's appeal. However, this has been largely overlooked by previous work.

A notable exception to this is Elliott's (2017) work on rhetorical strategies used by the Tea Party and their correlation with the rhetoric used by the Republican Party in its contemporary form. As the Tea Party distinguishes itself by acting as a movement that supports the GOP but is not aligned with the Republican Party, Tea Party rhetoric is similar to traditional conservative rhetoric yet with critical distinctions. Elliott (2017) analyzes the correlation between Tea Party-supported politicians' rhetoric and mainstream conservative discourse after the Tea Party's ascendence in the 2010 midterms. Using Chilton and Schäffner's (2002) theory that "talk matters," Elliott (2017) found that Tea Party discourse included five central rhetorical strategies: inducing fear, political myths, racial appeals, conspiratorial accusations, and personal insults. These techniques can often work in tandem. For example, the conspiracy theory that President Obama was born in Kenya and was secretly a Muslim utilized fears about terrorism in Middle East, racism against Black Americans, conspiracy theories and myths about a political rival, and insults designed to undermine the public's perception of President Obama.

Similarly, Radziej and Molek-Kozakowska (2022), in an analysis of official Tea Party website content from the 2018 midterm elections, find that the dominant rhetorical strategies are:

> (1) homogenizing the representation of true patriots, (2) polarization between "good us" and "evil them," (3) discrediting of opponents through analogies, "worst" examples, and *ad hominem* attacks, (4) conspiracy theorizing, and (5) the mobilization of pathos and ethos related to mediatized, historicized, and moralized cultural imaginaries. (116)

These strategies frame political rivals as an "other" whose beliefs are not just "harmful," but are irreconcilable with what it means to be a "real" American. Importantly, Radziej and Molek-

Kozakowska's (2022) analysis comes after the rise of Donald Trump within the Republican Party, which may have significantly influenced the Tea Party's rhetoric. While the latter study acknowledges morality claims, little is mentioned beyond an acknowledgement of their existence.

To the degree to which scholarship surrounding the Tea Party has focused on rhetoric, the rhetoric of racism within the Tea Party, and conservatives as a whole, has been a central focus. Haney-López (2014) found that the Tea Party used dog-whistle rhetoric to appeal to conservatives through rhetoric such as Santelli's complaint that the government was using taxes to subsidize "bad behavior" (149). Santelli's argument here is a moral one, and while Haney-López (2014) explicitly makes the connection with dog whistle racism, there is little attention paid to the racist concept of morality underlying Santelli's claim. Johnson (2013) also finds that Santelli's rhetoric and his use of the phrase "silent majority" were a call back to the politics of a racialized past that empowered "true" Americans while stimulating racial animus (2). Hughey and Parks (2014) argue that the Tea Party was not a subtly racist movement, calling attention to the overtly racist rhetoric within the Tea Party and its white-supremacist and nationalist undertones. Skocpol and Williamson (2012), in contrast, write that racial overtones were unmistakable but when overt racism arose grassroots activists tried to quell the racist rhetoric as it surfaced within the movement. Parker (2014) uses interpretive frames to help understand how Tea Party sympathizers made sense of a landscape in which Obama was president. While it is clear that the Tea Party alluded to, or outright used, racist language to discuss contemporary societal issues and President Obama, other components of Tea Party rhetoric are also central to understanding the movement as a whole and its trends toward extremism.

Others locate the Tea Party's rhetoric more broadly, finding it to exist within frames that hold meaning for the group but carry little weight among the broader public. Engels (2010) connects the rhetoric of Tea Partiers to the rhetoric of victimage used by Nixon, writing that: "It does not aim to make Americans feel better. Instead, this rhetoric aims to cultivate, and perpetuate, feelings of resentment in order to score political points and achieve electoral victories" (305). Lundskow (2012) argues that Tea Party supporters exist within a dependent subjective reality which can be shared by people of similar social class, status group, personality, and the impact of stage setting. Tea Party patriotism is then not a matter of truth or falsehood but of carnival, and its rhetoric consists of free-floating signifiers that convey their true meaning only to the ingroup enthusiasts (Lundskow2012). This is *carnival* because it stands as its own self-contained reality with rules independent of truth beyond its boundaries (Lundskow 2012). To replace a truth with a lie, the liar must know the truth and is always concerned with the truth (Lundskow 2012). Thus, carnival is not a lie but follows the logic of "bullshit," meaning it has no concern with the truth but does not require lying; truth is irrelevant to the bullshitter, who makes no distinction between truth and lie (Lundskow 2012). Boser and Lake (2014) advocate for a constitutive framework in analyzing Sarah Palin's post-Tucson video, finding her speech to be epideictic through its severance of the attitudes she promoted from the material events that occurred. Boser and Lake's (2014) analysis, along with Lundskow's (2012), find that the Tea Party preferred to disconnect itself from the reality of events in favor of an imagined reality, such as the one Engels (2010) notes.

Other scholars have studied Tea Party rhetoric in other formations, drawing various conclusions about its motives and efficiencies. Deckman (2017) locates the rhetoric used by Tea Party women within specific frames of gendered rhetoric used to promote conservative policies/.

Among these are the "motherhood frame," "freedom feminism," and gendered claims about big government, all of which are used to activate Tea Party friendly sentiments within conservative women (Deckman 2017, 3). In an analysis of Marco Rubio and Ron Paul's speeches at the 2013 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), Rowley (2014) found that in an evaluation of the reconstitutive discourse practices and accommodations made and missed, that their rhetoric of creating a united GOP was ultimately unsuccessful. Ultimately, a synthesis of their discourse would have been more effective at appealing to a broad range of conservatives (Rowley 2014). Lepore (2010) argues that the Tea Party utilized a form of historical fundamentalism, or "anti-history," consisting of a set of assumptions that conflated originalism, evangelicalism, and heritage tourism (15-16). This historical fundamentalism is marked by the belief that a particular, narrowly defined past is ageless and sacred; for Tea Partiers the founding documents are nothing less than sacrosanct (Lepore 2010).

Political Rhetoric

Certain schemas of political rhetoric are most relevant to modern conservatives. In particular, the Tea Party's emphasis on a shared morality which centers on personal responsibility and a commitment to the historical foundation of the United States. Some work locates political discourse as occurring through symbols and stories, others find it within speech acts, and a few use metaphors of morality as a method for understanding political discourse.

Chilton and Schäffner locate a perception of shared values as defining political associations through language's function of "indicating," that is, signifying or communicating what is deemed to be right or wrong according to what is advantageous for the group (Chilton and Schäffner 2002, 2). There is, in this theory, a connection between speech act and validity claims which is central to understanding political discourse (Chilton and Schäffner 2002). This

claim mirrors the idea that the verbalization of an act is part of the act or the performance of power (Shapiro 1984). Thus, the structure and institutionalized form of language used to communicate is embodied and performed through speech acts (Shapiro 1984).

Moral Rhetoric and Politics

Lakoff argues that metaphors of morality are utmost in understanding political discourse, finding that liberals and conservatives differ in their moral conceptions of themselves and the world (Lakoff 2002). From this lens, individuals view politics through fundamentally different conceptions of what is moral. Conservatives adhere to what Lakoff identifies as the "Strict Father" model while liberals hold a worldview identified as the "Nurturant Parent" model (2002, 33). For example, a conservative model citizen: has conservative values and acts to support them, is self-disciplined and self-reliant, upholds the morality of reward and punishment, works to protect moral citizens, and acts in support of the moral order (Lakoff 2002). On the other hand, a liberal model citizen is empathetic, helps the disadvantaged, protects those who need protection, promotes and exemplifies fulfillment in life, and takes care of themself so they can do these things (Lakoff 2002). Haidt views morality's influence on political views somewhat differently, finding that morality encompasses six paradigms: harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, purity/sanctity, and the provisional use of liberty/oppression (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009; Graham, Nosek, and Haidt 2012; Haidt 2012). In this schema, known as Moral Foundations Theory (MFT), liberals place the most emphasis on fairness/reciprocity and harm/care while conservatives value purity/sanctity, authority/respect, and ingroup/loyalty more (Graham, Nosek, and Haidt 2012; Haidt 2012; Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009). Skitka and Bauman (2008) have found that people who experience strong moral convictions about both candidates *and* issues are more likely to vote than those who do not.

Moreover, this conviction was an equal opportunity motivator on the political left and right, a finding which holds valuable implications on how politicians engage voters and encourage them to turn out on election day (Skitka and Bauman 2008).

Scholars have taken up Haidt's work in various ways. Graham et al. (2012) found that partisans on both sides of the political spectrum held exaggerated beliefs about the degree to which the other side pursues moral outcomes which are different from their own. Graham and Haidt (2010) examined the unique role that the binding foundations– that is, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity– play in religious communities. Clifford and Jarit (2013) used MFT to analyze attitudes on stem cell research and Koleva et al. (2012) explored how MFT affects views on culture war issues. Koleva et al. (2012) found that fairness/reciprocity was the weakest foundation predictor of moral disapproval on 13 culture war issues studies. However, they acknowledge that the model of fairness/reciprocity could have failed to capture variations in how the foundation is interpreted (Koleva et al. 2012). Using MFT, Kupyers (2020) found in an analysis of former President Trump's speeches that ingroup/loyalty, harm/care, and fairness/reciprocity were emphasized more than any other moral foundation, suggesting a populist bent more than the authoritarian narrative projected by the news media. However, Kupyers (2020) does not explicitly extend the models of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity to acknowledge how they may differ in meaning between political orientations.

When originally proposed, Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009) used a specific factor method that identified moral beliefs as discrete. However, recent work has advocated for the use of network methods that move beyond the latent construct approaches of factor analysis, a method used in machine learning to predict underlying factors based on a set of observed factors, towards a model of moral systems in which the foundations can directly impact one another

(Turner-Zwinkels et al. 2021). This expansion recognizes the dynamic nature of moral values while still utilizing MFT. In an assessment of the theories provided by Haidt (2012) and Lakoff (2002), McAdams et al. (2008) found that both theories were strongly supported by evidence, and while the corresponding theories are different with respect to psychological domains, they provide complementary perspectives on politics and personality. This study, however, seems to utilize Lakoff's theory in a more literal sense than necessary. Lakoff's analysis provides a more expansive picture of morality, expanding on his previous scholarship on metaphor (2002; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Given the nature of the metaphor that provides, the models should be used less literally than in the approach taken by McAdams et al. (2008). Lakoff's theory of moral politics provides a more coherent view of the individual's dominant group and its values. However, Haidt's terminology, which closely mirrors the values Lakoff identifies, can be useful in its application to rhetorical analysis.

Symbols and Storytelling

Within those who see political discourse as arising from the use of symbols and stories, particular attention has been paid to the evolution of the word "liberal." Rotunda (1986), Neiheisel (2016), and Jarvis (2005) use the term "liberal" as an entry point into the analysis of political rhetoric. Symbols in modern politics can be used to generate loyalty and carry significance for individuals who self-identify with a political group (Rotunda 1986). According to this view, "symbols do not only reflect; they mold" people's thoughts and perceptions of the world (Rotunda 1986, 7). Neiheisel (2016) found that exposure to anti-liberal rhetoric made no change to ideology among self-identified democrats, despite the symbolism used to portray liberalism poorly (2016). For Jarvis (2005), political labels act as symbols in that: they are accessible; they help citizens make efficient decisions; they can be influenced by preexisting

partisan or candidate driven dispositions; they can be primed or subverted through communication technologies; and they can point to perceived differences between the two parties. While liberal is the main term analyzed across these works, the conclusions can be extrapolated to include other terms often weaponized in political discourse. In the case of the Tea Party, these terms might include those revolving around constitutionalism and traditional values.

The use of symbols in political rhetoric is closely aligned with the use of storytelling, or the construction of a cohesive narrative through the use of symbols. Lee (2012) writes that the conservative political canon acted as a method for insularity prior to Fox News and the modern media ecosystem. The canon served the purpose of binding conservatives through the use of common symbols that modeled conservative values, including social authority, individual humility, and the importance of heritage (Lee 2012). Ricci (2011) constructs a framework that integrates ideas of speech acts, metaphors and symbolic language, and morality to analyze conservative political rhetoric through the identification of specific rhetorical appeals repeatedly used by conservatives. According to Ricci's (2011) analysis, "right-wingers tend to describe the world and our concerns in it via stories" (4-5), whereas liberals prefer to create concepts and practices, or theories, that challenge long standing beliefs about the world. Conservatives tend to assume that the micro-level substance of society (composed by individuals) can be extended to a macro-level reality (composed of collective entities) that embraces all the bits and pieces, or values and concerns, that were there to begin with (Ricci 2011). Ricci's (2011) proposition that conservatives extend the micro-level substance of society to macro-level structures aligns with Lakoff's argument that, for conservatives, the family is the basis of all morality, all social arrangements, and all politics (Lakoff 2001). Furthermore, conservatives' use of anecdotes to illustrate points and arguments, particularly when they entail persuasive correlations, is related to

the use of symbols that Rotunda identifies as reflecting people's perceptions of the world (Ricci 2011; Rotunda 1986). Anecdotes serve as symbols that attempt to represent the opposing group (in this case, liberals) as homogenous and simplistic. In doing so, they reflect the audience's preconceived notions about the other side of the political aisle– and the world.

Other scholars have also identified narration as symbolic action, meaning humans communicate through words and/or deeds that have "sequence and meaning for those who create, live, or interpret them" (Fisher 1984, 2). Fisher's (1984) theory of the narrative paradigm is useful for understanding how humans reason together in the social world through the construction of narratives—or stories—that help them make sense of the world. The narrative paradigm pushes back on the popular conception of rhetoric as solely rational argument (Fisher 1984). In doing so, it creates space for other approaches to public rhetoric, as Fisher (1984) demonstrates through his case study of public moral argument. Narratives, as performed through symbolic action, are moral constructs (Fisher 1984) because they appeal to the audience's lived experiences and interpretation of events. In politics, stories can be thematize an issue and open the audience to persuasion through dimensions of iconicity and adaptation (Leslie 2015). These dimensions both appeal to and bind together certain communities by creating the appearance of common experiences (Leslie 2015). Stories then act as a persuasive medium in politics, helping constituencies to identify with rhetors and thus earning their vote.

Community: Rhetorics and Values

The idea of community is deeply intertwined with a shared set of moral and social values that bind the group together. Hogan identifies the rhetoric of each community as reflecting a specific historical context, shared memories, and common life experiences (1998, 292). In this measure, the problem of community is largely a rhetorical problem, rooted in the shared

perception of enduring moral concepts (Hogan 1998). Hogan (1998) notes that the strategy of hate by personification allows communities to unite in opposition against the ideals of another group, represented by a particular person. This rhetorical strategy is what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) distinguish from as a metonymic concept rather than a metaphor. A metonymic concept acts as a referential function that is grounded in the experience of the audience; they structure not just our language but our thoughts, attitudes, and actions (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Procter's (2005) study of community takes a sociopolitical language perspective that situates rhetorical acts as a materialization of the social and political beliefs of larger rhetorical communities (2005). Using symbolic form theory and communication as performance theory, Procter (2005) identifies specific and interrelated community building rhetorics in civic communion events: 1) a historical presence comprised of value talk, ideographic talk, and history talk, 2) appeals to interdependence, and 3) a spiritual rhetoric. Procter's (2005) theory of the rhetoric of community offers a model that is both loose and robust in the study of community rhetoric, leaving space for the interpretation of these features in other situations.

This "othering" and us vs. them mentality serves as an important component of demagogic rhetoric. Demagogic rhetoric always depends on binaries because "reducing political discussions to expressions of condemnation of the out-group and praise of the in-group makes policy questions feel simpler" (Roberts-Miller 2019, 22, 41). The personification of hate (Hogan 1998) and the use of the "worst example" (Ricci 2011, 74) are reflections of what Roberts-Miller argues is a strategy of demagoguery. Demagogic rhetoric invites people to imagine themselves as members of a particular group by telling them that is already who they are (Roberts-Miller 2019). When this strategy is effective, it persuades people to see beliefs and policies as "naturally" emanating from who they "essentially" are– good people (Roberts-Miller 2019).

Engels (2015) argues that a similar result comes from the rhetoric that reflects the politics of resentment which pits the people against one another in favor of the neoliberal elite. While the rhetoric of community does not directly correlate with the use of othering and the construction of us versus them arguments, this form of othering cannot exist without a preexisting sense of community that has been established through the perception of a shared morality.

Sociologists and political scientists have studied community more robustly than rhetoricians and have come to their own conclusions about communities and the role that morality plays in shaping worldviews and binding people to one another. In a study of what purportedly rural communities and their attitudes towards the Tea Party, Hochschild (2016) writes that "the Tea Party was not so much an official political group but a culture, a way of seeing and feeling about a place and its people" (19). That is, the Tea Party is about moral attitudes and worldviews more than a specific set of policy initiatives.

Wuthnow (2018) comes to similar conclusions but argues that Hochschild's (2016) study is not a *true* study of rural communities. Wuthnow (2018) more clearly explicates the argument that rural Americans live in moral communities. However, this does not mean moral in "the vernacular sense 'moral' as good, right, virtuous, or principled," rather "in the more specialized sense of a place to which and in people feel an obligation to one another and to uphold the local ways of being that govern their expectations about ordinary life and support their feelings of being at home and doing the right things" (Wuthnow 2018). These rural communities are places of moral obligation, and

> The cultural compact that holds rural communities together consists in important measure an agreement about basic moral principles, such as honesty, hard work, neighborliness,

> and faith, as well as tacit agreement on social norms such as being friendly and participating in community events. (Wuthnow 2018, 138)

In this view, rural communities vote for conservatives because they see these candidates as understanding of their way of life and willing to uphold the moral order which they so highly value. These basic moral principles, perhaps, are what conservatives mean when they reference the idea of "traditional values."

Chapter Two

Making and Remaking the Movement

Mark Meckler and Jenny Beth Martin

Tea Party Patriots was written by Mark Meckler and Jenny Beth Martin (2012), both of whom were prominent in the Tea Party movement during its impetus in 2009, lays out the Tea Party Patriots "plan to restore America to its prior greatness" (11) by detailing various aspects of American life and how the Tea Party agenda would improve them. This includes education, culture, and the judicial system, along with traditional economic and political approaches. While this analysis discusses the Tea Party approach to economics, its focus is on plans regarding education, popular culture, and the judicial system because: (1) while attitudes about the economy and government spending are also grounded in moral concepts, discussions of culture reveal more clearly the moral concepts which underlie these approaches, and (2) as I will later show, Republican politicians who to aligned themselves with the Tea Party relied heavily upon matters of culture, education, and the courts, given that their economic policy priorities were already similar to the Tea Party's priorities.

According to Martin and Meckler (2012), the Tea Party Patriots arose from the fact that "we felt isolated in our belief that America was special, exceptional, a shining city upon a hill" (13) and the values and beliefs held by those who see America this way are not reflected in the political class, legislatures, classrooms, culture, and the halls of justice. The authors define *Tea Party Patriots* as "a call to arms for those who remember how great America once was," that asks them to "join the movement that will ultimately restore America to its place as the greatest country the world has ever seen" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 15). Patriots are those willing to fight—perhaps literally—for their country and their beliefs, taking whatever measures necessary

to achieve their goal. In this case, that goal is returning "America to its place as the greatest country the world has ever seen." This also implies that America is no longer the greatest country in the world because *some* people have kept it from being that way, whether through their policies, morals, or actions. These people, then, are not true patriots.

While "the content of conservative media is dominated by broad social and cultural appeals" (Jarvis 2021), rather than specific policy proposals, *Tea Party Patriots* presents both social and cultural appeals as well as policies. *Tea Party Patriots* is named for the national Tea Party organization co-founded by its authors. Martin and Meckler claim that, as an organization, the Tea Party Patriots do not focus on "issues like abortion and gay marriage" that "have little to do with our three core principles" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 22) of fiscal responsibility, a constitutionally limited government, and free markets. This claim, however, does not change the fact that the language of *Tea Party Patriots* is implicitly and explicitly moral. In fact, their adherence to a set of beliefs and values which, when abandoned cause "our beloved nation–the greatest nation in the history of the world–[to] slip away" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 13), demonstrates their underlying adherence to a particular set of moral values.

According to Meckler and Martin, the "two key elements missing from our education system [are] *exceptionalism* and *liberty*" (2012, 129; emphasis original). This view, of course, is grounded in the Tea Party principles of American exceptionalism and individualism. The philosophical foundations of the Tea Party's approach to education include school choice, an end to federal control over local schools–otherwise known as abolishing the Department of Education–, an end to collective bargaining for educators, and for "failing schools to be shut down" (Martin and Meckler 2012, 127). As Lakoff (2002, 228) writes, "the very first category of conservative moral action includes acts of promoting and defending conservative morality."

Thus, “the privatization of education means that conservatives can set up their own schools in which their children will not have to learn about anything that might be inconsistent with conservative morality and politics” (Lakoff 2002, 230-231). According to the Tea Party, “if the free market were allowed to operate…parents would have more and better choices of schools for their children” (Meckler and Martin 2012, 125). To demonstrate the validity of their claim, Meckler and Martin point to the Success Academy charter schools in New York City, specifically to the school’s success in Harlem where it opened its first locations. Success Academy received more than 17,000 applications for 3,288 available spots during the 2018-19 school year (Chapman 2018) because, as Meckler and Martin (2012, 113) claim, “to the extent that parents in Harlem–and parents across America–can choose which school is best for their children, they overwhelmingly abandon the failing public schools.”

It is a given that parents everywhere want the best for their children, but Meckler and Martin’s neat analysis of the situation overlooks the fact that charter schools, which are publicly funded but privately run, divert desperately needed money from “failing” public schools. Their support of private schools, therefore, is not a matter of cutting government spending, but of privatizing education to ensure that it aligns with a particular value set.

America’s education system lacks a “culture that measures, recognizes, values, and rewards exceptionalism, and has the courage to weed out bad apples” (Meckler and Martin 2012, 131). Success Academy’s ability to produce test scores well above state averages (Success Academy, n.d.), despite the fact that it is determined by a random lottery (Success Academy, n.d.) seems to contradict the claim that bad apples need to be weeded out. Instead, this suggests that every child is capable of learning, if only they are provided with the right environment and appropriate resources. Conservatives emphasize both moral and educational standards, as well as

a system of rewards and punishments in education (Lakoff 2002). In this context, the Tea Party's admiration of Success Academy is based upon the rigorous academics and strict disciplinary measures the schools are known for–policies which largely affect the children of color the schools are known for serving (Gonzalez 2013; Taylor 2016; Goldstein 2016; Zimmerman 2020). The New York Department of Education found that during the 2010-11 scholar year, 22% of Success Academy students were suspended at least once, compared to an average 3% of students in public schools (Gonzalez 2013). For conservatives more broadly, the use of charter schools and vouchers "would also mean a move away from the integration of schools, which means that the children of conservatives would not have to encounter students from different subcultures with different values" (Lakoff 2002, 230-231). The effort to instill conservative values in children through education also goes hand-in-hand with combatting the "liberal" values imbued in media and popular culture.

The values transmitted through media and culture both shape and are shaped by their audience. Hence, for Tea Partiers, it is unacceptable that "while it is just fine to portray free-market capitalists as villains, it is no longer acceptable to do the same for religious terrorists" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 178). "And, of course," they write, "it has become a cliche in recent years for movies to demonize American soldiers and veterans" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 179). This comment is made in reference to Brian de Palma's film *Redacted*, which was released in 2007 and features a dramatized version of real events, depicts the rape and murder of a 15-year-old Iraqi girl by American soldiers (Magnolia Pictures, n.d.). This is problematic because the film does not "applaud America as a force for good in the world," and does not celebrate our "traditional heroes," but rather demonizes them (Meckler and Martin 2012, 179). *Tea Party Patriots* utilizes this example to demonstrate the fact that popular media does not portray the

values of "real" Americans—despite the fact that *Redacted* grossed only $11.5 million at the box office, which is particularly poor compared to the film's budget of $35 million (Garofoli 2007). Conservatives dislike art that "probes the dark side of American life and American history and forces us to confront the not-very-nice facts about our country, as well as art concerning deep conflicts within our culture" (Lakoff 2002, 239), because within Strict Father morality, "art can be seen as having a value if it serve a moral purpose, say, to build moral strength and character or to display moral modes of life" (Lakoff 2002, 236). *Redacted* depicts a dark side of America, and for that reason, it is morally unacceptable to Meckler and Martin.

Tea Party Patriots describes the Tea Party's role in redefining culture as akin to the counterculture movement of the 1960s. However, the key difference is that "while the 1960s led to a period in which our youth turned away from morality, religion, and our Founders' legacy, the Tea Party movement embraces these values" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 191). Rather than abandoning popular culture, Meckler and Martin (2012) encourage engagement with this culture in order to reshape it. This is because:

> We are part of a movement that wants to return our culture to the time when American power–and the principles that gave rise to that power–were seen as a beacon of liberty and freedom. We want to go back to the time when honesty, integrity, and a good work ethic were celebrated; today's culture, by contrast, rewards depravity and bad behavior with "fifteen minutes of fame." (Meckler and Martin 2012, 191)

The individuals who share Tea Party values, who were once described by Roger Ailes as "'half the country'" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 192), should encourage the creation of "books, music, art, television, and films that embrace what is great about America" because the potential audience is "far bigger than the audience that is already well serves (or perhaps overserved) by a

plethora of entertainment that denigrates American values" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 192). Similarly to Lakoff's (2002) identification of the segregation between values encouraged through the conservative educational agenda, Meckler and Martin (2012) propose that Tea Partiers, and others who share their values, should segregate themselves from mainstream media, thereby creating echo chamber in which all media constantly reinforces a particular set of values and ideas.

Conservative Political Communication (Jarvis 2021), a collection of essays on how right-wing media and messaging remade American politics, focuses on conservative political media rather than conservative efforts to reshape culture more broadly. However, it makes the important point that "conservatism as a brand name, or as a collection of general principles and values, is consistently more popular than conservatism as a package of detailed policy positions" (Jarvis 2021, 12). This idea, in part, explains why *Tea Party Patriots* is adamant about the creation of media that celebrates American values. By producing their own "books, movies, music, theater, visual arts, and the environment in which these cultural touchstones are created" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 186), conservatives are able to spread their values and principles without discussing specific policy positions. As Meckler and Martin (2012) recognize, cultural touchstones "have such a huge impact on the ideals of a society that they should not be left to chance" (186). For leaders of the Tea Party, the creation of media that reflects American values is important because "the Tea Party movement believes that the area of American culture is too important to cede to those who apologize for America's greatness and the values that got us here" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 186). Moreover, to cede the creation of these touchstones to those who "apologize for America's greatness" would allow the "cultural elite," a term Meckler

and Martin allude to but do not directly use, to create art and media that does not reflect "true" American values.

Conservatives disdain the "cultural elite" because, in their view, art that contradicts their values is not art (Lakoff 2002). While the word "elite" connotes a sense of "superiority and prestige, often with the connotation that the prestige is undeserved," it also conveys the sense of a "prestigious, self-sustaining in-group" (Lakoff 2002, 240). The term "cultural elite" must be understood in context of the fact that "Strict Father morality subordinates culture to [its own] morality" (Lakoff 2002, 240). Therefore, "the idea of a real cultural superiority that isn't moral superiority" (Lakoff 2002, 240) does not make sense to conservatives. It is for this reason that Meckler and Martin advocate incentivizing young people to pursue careers in the arts, because "if we fail to do so, we risk losing our position as the world's leader in the creation of intellectual property" (2012, 186). As Lakoff (2002) demonstrates, conservatives understand America as the ultimate creator of culture because Strict Father morality, which conservatives identify as American values, is imbued within its culture. Thus, despite the fact that Meckler and Martin (2012) claim they are not invested in social or cultural questions, their investment in the direction of culture and education betrays a commitment to conservative social policies.

Martin and Meckler list various education reform policies proposed by Tea Party members. Among those policies are defunding the Department of Education, education tax opt-outs, and advocating for different textbooks or withdrawing their children from school if it uses textbooks which "teach that American exceptionalism is a farce and that America is a force for evil in this world" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 145-46). Instead, the books children read should teach them "the truth, as evidenced by the last two hundred-plus years of history, providing that America is the greatest nation in history" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 146). Education tax opt-

outs, Meckler and Martin (2012, 145) argue, would "allow taxpayers to opt out of property taxes for local schools that do not perform." This policy would "introduce the concept of *consequences for bad behavior* into the education system" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 145). This policy, of course, would further divert funding from schools that are likely already struggling due to a lack of resources. Since conservatives believe that all major ills in our society result from a failure to abide by their moral system, they are eager to defund educational programs that they do not see as promoting their moral system (Lakoff 2002). The issue of standards in education is not whether they are local or national, or whether children are held to those standards, but whether or not the standards reflect Strict Father morality (Lakoff 2002). "In short," Lakoff (2002, 231) writes, "the conservative educational agenda is very much in support of a conservative moral agenda and the politics that it leads to."

While many of the policies proposed in *Tea Party Patriots* feign a return to constitutional principles, they also demonstrate a kind of reactionary politics (Parker 2014). Parker argues that "people are driven to support the Tea Party from the anxiety they feel as they perceive the America they know, the country they love, slipping away, threatened by the rapidly changing face of what they believe is the 'real' America" (2014, 3). The reactionary nature of the Tea Party is most obvious in Meckler and Martin's discussion of education and popular culture. However, it is also on display in their discussion of the judiciary.

To demonstrate the outsized power of the judiciary, Meckler and Martin present the example of Oklahoma State Question 755, which "clarified the separation between church and state enshrined in the First Amendment" and was approved by an "overwhelming 70% of the vote" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 149). Question 755, also known as the Save Our State Amendment, was written on the ballot as follows:

> This measure amends the State Constitution. It changes a section that deals with the courts of this state. It would amend Article 7, Section 1. It makes courts rely on federal and state law when deciding cases. It forbids courts from considering or using international law. It forbids courts from considering or using Sharia Law.
>
> International law is also known as the law of nations. It deals with the conduct of international organizations and independent nations, such as countries, states and tribes. It deals with their relationship with each other. It also deals with some of their relationships with persons.
>
> The law of nations is formed by the general assent of civilized nations. Sources of international law also include international agreements, as well as treaties.
>
> Sharia Law is Islamic law. It is based on two principal sources, the Koran and the teaching of Mohammed.
>
> Shall the proposal be approved?[3]

The ballot measure was challenged in court where the judge, Vicki Miles-LaGrange, found that:

> While defendants contend that the amendment is merely a choice of law provision that bans state courts from applying the law of other nations and cultures, regardless of what faith they may be based on, if any, the actual language of the amendment reasonably, and perhaps more reasonably, may be viewed as specifically singling out Sharia Law, conveying a message of disapproval of plaintiff's faith. (Cohen 2012)

Meckler and Martin write that "even though Oklahoma voters support the new law separating church and state," the permanent injunction overruled "the will of the people" (2012, 149).

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[3] Oklahoma International and Sharia Law, State Question 755, O.K. H.R. 1056, 52nd Legislature (2010).

The decision to use Question 755 as their primary example for the brazen power of the judiciary is important because it demonstrates the reactionary nature of the Tea Party as well as its covert concern for social issues, despite claims to the contrary. During the 2012 presidential primary, several Republican candidates, including Newt Gingrich, Sarah Palin, and Michele Bachmann, warned of the dangers of Sharia law (Ambinder 2010). Moreover, Meckler and Martin's subtle support of Question 755 indicates that they are less concerned with returning to the "original intent of America's Founders as expressed through the Constitution" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 149), than with advancing their own beliefs. In general, conservatives are against multiculturalism because "forms of morality other than their own are not moral and therefore not to be tolerated" (Lakoff 2002, 228). Parker (2014) found that, with the exception of free speech, strong supporters of the Tea Party tend to value security rather than civil liberties. This finding helps to explain why members of the Tea Party would support a measure that violates the First Amendment. In their mind, Question 755 did not violate the Constitution because it protected them from harm by the scapegoated group. In this way, the Tea Party engages in demagoguery by dividing the world into victims and perpetrators.

Tea Party Patriots outlines several "long-term proposals to fix our broken judicial system" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 162). Among those policies are tort reform and prioritizing the selection of ideologically aligned Supreme and Appellate court selections (Meckler and Martin). They argue that tort law in the United States causes "stifled innovation, due to fear of punitive class-action lawsuits," (Meckler and Martin 2012, 163) and claim that "in today's litigious society" (164) Jonas Salk–inventor of the polio vaccine–"would be the target of multiple class-action lawsuits for conducting such experimental trials on school children, and whoever gave these children candy would be sued for contributing to childhood obesity" (165).

This argument makes the subtle suggestion that the government would rather allow children to die from diseases such as polio than protect the inventors of potentially life-saving medical treatment. Moreover, it has been shown that Republicans in state legislatures are more likely than Democrats to pursue tort reform (Matter and Stutzer 2016), meaning that the issue further aligns the Tea Party with Republican policies.

Meckler and Martin also discuss the importance of the president's power to appoint Appellate and Supreme Court justices. They write that "when used as a tool to implement a particular view of society, as has been done to dramatic effect under the Obama administration, it is a more powerful tool than any other the president wields" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 173). After criticizing the "radical" views of Justices Kagan and Sotomayor, they claim that "although presidents are supposed to nominate the most qualified jurists available, in recent years, this standard has all but been abandoned" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 175). In doing so, Meckler and Martin imply that neither Justices Kagan nor Sotomayor are qualified to be Supreme Court Justices. Taking their position further, they lament the Senate's refusal to confirm Judge Robert Bork to the Supreme Court, writing that "Bork was an avowed 'originalist' and as such a serious threat to those who pursue judicial activism" (Meckler and Martin 2012, 175). Constitutional originalism aligns itself closely with conservative causes, meaning that Tea Party support for constitutional originalism is nothing more than Republicanism by a different name (Noble 1987), a further indication of the Tea Party's alignment with traditional conservatism.

While as a book *Tea Party Patriots* was not particularly well recognized, the organization it is named for continues to work on behalf of conservative causes. This includes the endorsement of Donald Trump in 2016 (Martin 2016), 2020 (Martin 2020), and 2024 (Martin 2024), as well as the continuing promotion of conservative ideals. While the Tea Party Patriots

organization still claims to focus on economic causes, it has broadened its scope to include the protection and promotion of "personal freedom" (Tea Party Patriots). Its website claims that "Americans sense a freedom gap, between how we value freedom and how free we actually feel today" (Tea Party Patriots), but per news articles featured on the site, with headlines such as "High School Principal Axed After Prom is Marred by 'Disgusting Spectacle' Featuring a Drag Queen" (Altomari 2024 per Tea Party Patriots) and "Hollywood Star Comes Under Fire for Getting Baptized One Day and Messing with Tarot Cards the Next" (Landry 2024 per Tea Party Patriots), it is clear that concerns about "personal freedom" extend only to those with a particular viewpoint. As Trump has become the center of conservative politics, Tea Party affiliated organizations have reorganized themselves around his narratives.

Glenn Beck

Radio host Glenn Beck's book *Cowards: What Politicians, Radicals, and the Media Refuse to Say* is his attempt to align himself with the Tea Party movement. Beck claims that "those on the right who stand for real conservatism are relentlessly attacked and marginalized," and points to "how Sarah Palin was treated" as a prime example of this claim (2012, 16). From the outset, Beck engages in a narrative of "us" versus "them." However, for Beck, "them" includes not only liberals, but traditional conservatives as well. According to this view, people who argue that "old-fashioned conservatism's time has passed" (Beck 2012, 16) want to expand the GOP "beyond its traditional base, be a big tent, be progressive" (Beck 2012, 16) are not true conservatives. Politicians like McCain and Romney, Beck claims, only introduce "more government, more spending, more taxes, more regulations, more bureaucracy, more interference by Washington in our daily lives" (Beck 2012, 17). This idea is key to understanding how Tea Party aligned libertarians understand themselves in relation to the Republican establishment.

Individuals associated with the Tea Party movement, while often distrustful of the party establishment (Skocpol and Williamson 2012), worked to create change within the Republican Party rather than creating a new political party (Elliott 2017). While traditional conservatives are part of the "them" Beck identifies, it is because they are perceived as being too willing to compromise their principles in an effort to win by catering to a larger audience.

Beck argues that because the Republican Party is willing to compromise the principles of its supporters, those disillusioned by the party should instead move towards libertarianism. These are voters who believe that the government has its citizens in a stranglehold and "the only way to end this stranglehold is to disconnect government from our morality, from our prosperity, and from our lives in general" (Beck 2012, 21). However, much of what these libertarians believe is similar to values help by the mainstream GOP. Beck writes that one of the areas of overlap between libertarians and conservatives is "conservatives who want to preserve traditional values understand that dependency is not helpful to the cause. Being self-sufficient is the best antidote to moral decay" (Beck 2012, 34). Moreover, both conservatives and libertarians believe that "prosperity fosters more self-reliance, stronger families, and more moral societies" (Beck 2012, 35). These statements seem to indicate that Beck takes no issue with Republicans overall, as evinced by his support of Sarah Palin, Michele Bachmann, and Rick Santorum (Beck 2012), but instead with the mainstream GOP who, along with Democrats, have been "completely infected by progressivism" (Beck 2012, 27). *Cowards*, he argues, is "the truth. About America, about the threats we face, and about those who are working hard every day to take away our exceptionalism" (Beck 2012, 39). Thus, the enemy of Beck's agenda is anyone who does not share his viewpoint because, in his words, those people are "working hard every day to take away our exceptionalism."

Cowards focuses more on foreign and domestic threats than its counterparts, veering away from the Tea Party's supposed focus on economic policy. In particular, Beck focuses on "threats" posed to the United States by Muslims and immigrants at the southern border. "Despite the thundering silence from the mainstream media," Beck writes, "the truth is that a small but increasing number of American Muslims are slowly, almost silently, being allowed to live by their own shariah law" (2012, 192). Before launching into an abbreviated description of shariah law, he argues that "if we continue to pretend that it is not happening, that those who practice shariah would love nothing more than for it to be widely accepted as the supreme law for U.S. Muslims, then it most certainly will" (Beck 2012, 192). Muslims are presented as a monolithic group who will be forced into practicing shariah law even when it is in conflict with the laws of our democracy because the courts allow "the legal system of the Islamic state [to] live and breathe within our supposedly secular democracy" (Beck 2012, 192).

Throughout his chapter on Islam, titled "The Islamist Agenda: Facts over Fear," Beck (2012) repeatedly insinuates that the laws and customs of Islam are not compatible with democracy, portraying the religion as indisputably political by claiming that "shariah can govern and dictate every aspect of life" (193). Beck often equates sharia with sharia law, despite the fact that sharia is the "divine counsel that Muslims follow to live moral lives and grow close to God" while sharia law is laws derived from the principles of sharia (Robinson 2021). By equating sharia and sharia law, Beck insinuates that all Muslims are required to adhere to sharia law, meaning that there is little distinction between extremists who want to impose sharia law and the vast majority of non-violent Muslims. This is in line with the strategy identified by Green (2015) in which U.S. political elites "constructed and perpetuated an Islamophobic narrative that featured the larger-than-life Muslim enemy as the most significant threat to U.S. values and

freedoms" (Green 2015, 103). For example, Beck writes that "shariah is in direct conflict with the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution because it mandates the denial of free speech and freedom of religion" (Beck 2012, 194). This language echoes sentiments expressed in President George W. Bush's "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," in which he states that Al Qaeda's goal is "remaking the world—and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere" (Bush 2001). Beck, however, takes the claim a step further by writing that "Muslim supremacy is a constant theme of shariah, and Holy War (jihad) against nonbelievers is required of all adherents" (2012, 194). This statement does not distinguish between the few Muslim extremists who follow an exacting standard of sharia and the millions of Muslims who peacefully worship the God of their choosing. Instead, this language further encourages the reader to view all Muslims as a threat by equating a small minority of them with the religion as a whole.

Beck's "us" vs. "them" language is both an instance of dog-whistle racism, as identified by Haney-López (2014), and an assumed reference to Muslims from North Africa and the Middle East. While Beck does not specifically indicate whether he is referring to this subset of Muslims, who made up only 20% of the total Muslim population in 2017 (Lipka 2017) *Cowards* references specific countries in its discussion of Islam, including Iran, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia (Beck 2012). Taking his claims about Islam further, Beck writes that while some portray caliphate as a "dirty, conspiracy laden-word," maybe "it's those who want to pretend that this does not exist, or keep Americans in the dark about it, who are actually the ones filled with hate and ignorance" (2012, 200). This perpetuates the idea that his audience is in on a special secret and that those "who want to pretend that this does not exist" are morally corrupt whereas Beck and his audience are righteous.

Education

Beck's discussion of education centers around the failures of educational policy during the presidencies of George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George H. W. Bush, and Barack Obama, listing off various statistics about the failure of American children to keep up with their international counterparts. "If we do nothing" about the education system he writes, "then I can assure you of two things: First, our politicians will continue to stand before the nation every January to offer ideas on how to 'fix things'; and second, our kids will keep paying the price" (Beck 2012, 217). Beck's solution to the education crisis, which he readily admits is impossible, involves two simple ideas: "*fire all 3.5 million public school teachers in America and shut down all of our publicly funded universities*" (Beck 2012, 217, emphasis original). He proposes these moves because all politicians seem to do is spend more money on education without yielding results, a move Beck describes as "the same thing as flushing [money] down a toilet—except that flushing it down the toilet doesn't make your kids stupid" (Beck 2012, 220). *Cowards* directs its ire at the failure of children to meet certain educational benchmarks or standards, and the federal government's spending on education for which there is "almost nothing to show for it" (Beck 2012, 217).

The issue of standards in education is important for conservatives because "the metaphors of Moral Authority and Moral Boundaries require absolute standards, imposed by a legitimate authority" (Lakoff 2002, 233). Education that is in line with conservative morality entails a set of standards based on the classics of Western culture that utilizes a system of reward and punishment by making students work hard and failing those who fail to meet such standards (Lakoff 2002). Beck praises the educational views of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, writing that "Jefferson was too polite to say it this way, but, basically, you're an idiot if you think that

government can educate kids better than parents can" (Beck 2012, 222) before focusing the blame for America's failure to educate children on Thomas Mann who wanted to "cut out certain brands of religion…from the public square" (Beck 2012, 223) and John Dewey who was a "supporter of the idea that elites (like himself) should determine how and what people learn" (Beck 2012, 223). The issue of standards in education for many conservatives, including Beck, is innately tied to the federal government's standardization of education. Conservatives oppose federal control of education, according to Lakoff (2002), because standards set by the Department of Education "include things that conservatives would rather not have taught" (230). Thus, the natural response to an educational agenda conservatives disagree with is the localization of education and the promotion of vouchers and charter schools.

Like many of his peers, Beck (2012) decries the "liberal" takeover of colleges and universities, but he also claims that "in many cases, kids actually lose basic knowledge as they go through college" (Beck 2012, 230). This assertion, compounded with the claim that "throughout our educational system, teachers and professors are indoctrinating students purposefully into the cult of the Left" (Beck 2012, 231) is the reason that Beck (2012) advocates shutting down all publicly funded universities. The solution to many of these problems is parental supervision to prevent progressives from further pushing their educational agenda on children (Beck 2012). Beck concludes that:

> The more 'educated' we get, the dumber we become. And that has always been the goal. There's a reason that slave masters wanted to keep their slaves illiterate: they understood that true education makes people long for freedom and liberty. Today's slave masters are the professors and unions and bureaucrats in Washington who run our education system. (Beck 2012, 239)

This comparison emphasizes that there is *intent* on the part of educators to prevent children from learning. It assigns blame to these individuals and compares them to slave-owners, an accusation which both minimizes the atrocity of human enslavement and encourages readers to view educators as vile and cruel-hearted. The argument for reforming the education system, according to Beck (2012), not simply about values such as freedom and liberty, it is about the morality of the whole system and its failings.

This is because, "by failing to act, we are proving to be delinquent not only as Americans, but as parents" (Beck 2012, 220). The failures of education are "a cycle of abuse of our children" and the only way to end is to "stop it cold turkey" (Beck 2012, 220). Here, Beck appeals to the metaphors of Moral Authority and Moral Boundaries (Lakoff 2002), which, as I have previously discussed, are central to conservative views of education. Within the metaphor of Moral Authority, parents set standards of behavior and are expected to punish children if those standards are not met (Lakoff 2002). Just as "the exertion of authority is moral behavior on the part of the authority figure" (Lakoff 2002, 78), authority figures who fail to exert authority are immoral because they "fail to set standards of behavior and to enforce them through punishment" (Lakoff 2002, 78). Parents who fail to exert their moral authority by setting standards for their children's education are acting immorality because they fail to impose certain standards. The metaphor of Moral Boundaries conceptualizes moral action as "bounded movement, movement in permissible areas and along permissible paths" (Lakoff 2002, 84). In the case of education, the bounded path is ensuring children have access to high-quality education, so to stray from this path is to be "delinquent" in regard to caring for our children. According to Beck (2012, 220), failing to educate our children is a "kind of neglect [that] would be unacceptable in any other realm," but "when we fail [our children] mentally, by not providing the teachers and facilities

and equipment they need to compete in the world, the government pats itself on its back and gives itself more money" (Beck 2012, 220).

Immigration

Aside from issues of education and terrorism, *Cowards* also focuses on immigration at the southern border. The chapter entitled "Bordering on Insanity: Drugs, Terrorism, and Murder in Our Backyard" (Beck 2012) argues that "the decades we've spent arguing about immigration reform and border security have resulted in a lot of accusations of hate and racism—but very little progress" (Beck 2012, 97). The so-called "national emergency brewing on our side of the border" means that "it's time for a new strategy" (Beck 2012, 97). This new strategy "is not about stopping illegal immigration or coming up with that elusive 'comprehensive immigration reform' bill—it's about stopping the culture of drugs and violence that has become almost routine" (Beck 2012, 97). By presenting the question of immigration at the southern border alongside matters such as drugs and cartel violence, Beck (2012) fuses the two separate matters into one issue. Rhetorically, this allows him to consider questions about the fate of illegal immigrants alongside a discussion about inhumanity and unlawfulness of cartels and, in the reader's mind, subtly presents the two issues as inextricably bound.

In addition to the subtle linkage of "immigrant" and "cartel," Beck also claims that terrorist groups, particularly Hezbollah, are entering the United States through Mexico, writing: "Many experts are concerned that members of 'traditional' terrorist groups, meaning Islamist fundamentalist groups like al-Qaeda, are entering the United States from Mexico in order to do bad things here" (2012, 107). The difference between cartels and terrorist organizations, he clarifies, is that "cartels don't have a religious or political ideology unless you consider power and money to be religion. Terrorists, on the other hand, generally *only* have a religious or

political ideology" (Beck 2012, 108). However, according to Beck, these groups are working together because (1) "we have strong evidence that Hezbollah has a significant number of members and associates in Mexico" (109) and (2) "we also have strong evidence that member and associates of Hezbollah (and perhaps other Islamist terrorist groups) have entered the United States from Mexico," either by crossing the border undetected or "by using human smugglers who specialize in moving other-than-Mexicans, or 'OTMs' across the border" (2012, 109). After conjecturing about the possibility of Hezbollah's collaboration with Mexican cartels, Beck concedes that there is, in fact, no evidence that "*operational*" (2012, 109) members of a terrorist group have entered the United States via Mexico. However, this concession is almost negligible in comparison to the claims preceding it, and fear has already been stoked in the reader's mind about the potential dangers across the southern border.

The fact that "Hezbollah is working along our southern border," as are cartels, thus "begs the question: Are they working together?" (Beck 2012, 110). Beck's response to this question: "Anything's possible, but at least so far, the evidence is just not there to support it" (2012, 110). Beck's specific claims and talking points echo Roger Noriega's testimony to the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Counterterrorism Intelligence in July 2011. Noriega, a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, claimed during his testimony that there "are the several published reports, citing U.S. law enforcement and intelligence sources, that Hezbollah operatives have provided weapons and explosives training to drug trafficking organizations that operate along the U.S. border with Mexico and have sought to radicalize Muslim populations in several Mexican cities."[4] However, as Noriega goes on to clarify, there is only anecdotal evidence of these claims. Beck, too, acknowledges that there is no evidence of the claims he

[4] *Hezbollah in Latin America-Implications for U.S. Homeland Security: Day 1, Before the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence*, 112th Cong. 01 (2011).

makes about cartels collaborating with Hezbollah, but "none of that changes the fact that our open border is responsible for clear cases of death and despair here in the United States" (2012, 111). Instead, "cartels are co-opting thousands of gang members in our cities and communities to sell those same drugs on our streets" (Beck 2012, 112) and "cartel members are killing and kidnapping people on U.S. soil" (Beck 2012, 113). These claims about the dangers of our "open border" center around cartels, terrorist organizations, and gangs. Each of the groups are representative of harmful stereotypes about people of color making these associations a form of dog-whistle racism (Haney-López 2014) as well as an appeal to fears about the "other" (Roberts-Miller 2017).

While many of Beck's rhetorical appeals center around fear, particularly in relation to immigrants, he also appeals—somewhat superficially—to the reader's sense of morality, writing: "I know that keeping our borders open is supposed to be the 'compassionate' thing to do, but has anyone ever stopped to think about how vulnerable that leaves the illegal immigrants who try to come here?" (2012, 117). Since "one of the more tragic trends we're seeing is acts of violence against illegal immigrants" (Beck 2012, 117). Interestingly, this seems to be a partial appeal to Nurturant Parent morality because, from this perspective, "illegal immigrants are seen as poor people looking for a better life who are often exploited" (Lakoff 2002, 188). However, in Beck's (2012) reasoning, the best way to keep these poor, exploited people safe is by not allowing them to immigrate at all. This reasoning, combined with unsubstantiated claims about terrorist organizations and cartels, leads Beck to write that he has been "on the border fence bandwagon for a long time now" (2012, 120). There are two reasons for a border fence: "first, because it would give us all some tangible evidence that the government is actually taking this seriously; and second, because I think that it will dissuade the vast majority of people from attempting to

come here" (Beck 2012, 120). Preventing cartels from entering the country is a battle of existential proportions because it's not just a "conflict between criminals who operate with impunity and a complete disregard for human life and a decent, moral, civilized society in which the rule of law still matters" (Beck 2012, 121), but a "struggle for common ground between two nations that have viewed each other with suspicion for over a hundred years" (Beck 2012, 121). Most of all, however, this is a "fight to give back to everyone what we all deserve most: safety, security, and the freedom to live our lives as we choose" (Beck 2012, 121).

However, Beck (2012) takes these claims about the failures of education further in his discussion of Marxism and critical theory. He writes that: "After World War I, a group of German Marxists decided that the best shot for communist success was to infiltrate culture and education…Once they were firmly ensconced in culture and education they could tear it down with something called 'critical theory'—the idea that everything needs to be criticized endlessly" (Beck 2012, 232). Critical theory, according to Beck, "was a Marxist philosophy brought to the United States by the so-called Frankfurt School" that was brought to the United States "when the Nazis took control of Europe, [and] these Frankfurt School Marxists realized they had best get out of town" (Beck 2012, 232). This discussion of the Frankfurt School and its motives is part of the alt-right narrative about cultural Marxism (Mirrlees 2018)—a term Beck (2012) does not use but alludes to. Beck claims that "political correctness also began with the Marxists who took over the universities" (2012, 233) and while he does not explicitly name the feminist, LGBTQ rights, and Black power movements that many on the alt-right attribute to the Frankfurt School (Mirrlees 2018), the term "political correctness" is a reference to these movements. As Lundskow (2012, 530) has shown, "Tea Party rhetoric consists of free-floating signifiers (images and utterances with no consistent social meaning beyond the ingroup) that convey their true

meaning in the minds of the ingroup enthusiasts, not in the literal denotation." Because of this, Beck (2012) is able to adopt postures of the alt-right without stating them explicitly, instead relying on free-floating signifiers, such as "political correctness," which convey his true meaning.

The university professors and administrators who are "the real 'fat cats' in America, the real one percent" (Beck 2012, 236) produce nothing but "a crop of students who leave their classroom hating America, hating capitalism, and apologizing for our history" (Beck 2012, 236). These professors and administrators have "been in bed with the government and the radical left to delegitimize individual rights and freedoms. They're destroying us" (Beck 2012, 236). The language of "destruction" is more outwardly hostile than was common in the early 2010s. However, it is important because this signals the beginning of a shift in Republican language towards presenting Democrats not just as irresponsible or even idiotic, but as a group that want to *destroy* America, one that fundamentally undermines the bedrock of the country. Language of "destruction" implies that politics is a battle. For this reason, Beck (2012, 249) argues, that "to fight back we are going to have to do a lot more than just attack the messengers; we're going to have to attack the message itself." If parents get involved, they can "make it that much more likely that their children will grow up to be entrepreneurs rather than Occupiers" (Beck 2012, 252). Beck's comparison of entrepreneurs versus Occupiers, obvious stand-ins for Republicans and Democrats, draws a distinction that holds moral weight. In Strict Father Morality, entrepreneurs are held up as conservative model citizens because they have "succeeded through hard work, have earned whatever they have through their own self-discipline," and "have been given nothing by the government and have made it on their own" (Lakoff 2002, 170). Occupiers, to Beck and his audience, signify people who have been handed everything they have, who are

not self-disciplined, and who expect the government to give them handouts. Since this does not align with the beliefs of Strict Father morality, it is therefore wrong and should be avoided at all costs.

Beck also presents ideas he disagrees with as something for the simple minded, writing that "socialism and cradle-to-grave social policies do have a simple emotional appeal, especially when cloaked in the language of 'fairness' and 'equality'…It's much more abstract and complex to think about the people who might be taxed to fund that program, or about that jobs that could've been created if that program didn't have to be funded, or about the chances that the government program might create perverse incentives or have unintended consequences that could wind up hurting the people it is intended to help" (Beck 2012, 252).

In *Cowards*, Beck (2012) creates us versus them narrative on surrounding culture war issues such as education, immigration, and religion, while linking these ideas to the Tea Party through his endorsement of its policies. In doing so, he influences his audience's understanding of the Tea Party movement, extending it beyond concerns about economic policy, taxation, or fiscal responsibility, to include issues about what American culture is and should be. Over time, this framing shifts public perceptions of the Tea Party while driving its grassroots supporters towards questions of culture. Beck and other media figures contributed to a broader realignment of conservatives, within and outside of the Tea Party, towards centering culture war questions without a real focus on economic policy. The extremist views Beck (2012) expresses throughout *Cowards* can arguably be understood as advancing extremist views within the Republican party as a whole.

Chapter Three

Inviting Themselves the Party

Newt Gingrich

I argue that in *To Save America: Stopping Obama's Secular-Socialist Machine* (Gingrich 2010) that Newt Gingrich uses the phrase "secular-socialism" as a metaphor for the immorality of Democratic policies by appealing to preconceived notions about the words. Using the Strict Father metaphor Lakoff presents in *Moral Politics*, I explore how Gingrich contrasts the "secular-socialism" of the left with the "traditional" American values of the right (Lakoff 2002). In doing so, he constructs liberals as immoral and positions conservatives as guardians of morality and protectors of "traditional" American values. Ultimately, I argue that these appeals constitute the us versus them thinking that has led to political extremism within the American right.

This essay focuses on *To Save America* for three reasons: 1) Gingrich uses the book to rhetorically align himself with the Tea Party, 2) the policy-oriented nature of the book suggests that it was written in preparation for his 2012 presidential campaign, and 3) books constitute a highly insulated element of the conservative media ecosystem. First, *To Save America* represents Gingrich's attempt to align himself with the Tea Party movement. While members of the Tea Party overwhelmingly voted Republican, they did not necessarily identify themselves as such due to their distrust of "establishment" Republicans and the baggage associated with the Republican label (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). This created an opening for conservative activists and politicians to rhetorically and politically align themselves with the movement while remaining part of the Republican party. Gingrich writes that the Tea Party "is a great example of the American people's courageous tradition of rejecting elitism and insisting on freedom" (2010,

311). While the Tea Party ostensibly focused on economic conservatism, Westermeyer has argued that the cultural world of the Tea Party consisted of three broad themes: patriotism and history, political and cultural fundamentalism, and emotional registers of indignation and mistrust (2019a, 78). Thus, in *To Save America*, Gingrich attempts to fuse cultural concerns, "secularism," with economic concerns, "socialism." While scholarship on the Tea Party has engaged with the movement's rhetorical strategies, it has seldom accounted for the role that moral appeals play in Tea Party rhetoric. If we are to understand what made the Tea Party so compelling to voters, we need to understand how political figures associated with the Tea Party movement embedded moral appeals in their policy ideas.

While aligning himself with the Tea Party may have been no more than political opportunism, the decision was important in light of the 2012 presidential election. It has become tradition for politicians to publish books prior to announcing their candidacy, despite the fact that many sell relatively poorly (McGill 2015; Rubin 2013). Unlike many of its counterparts, however, *To Save America* spent four weeks on the *New York Times* Bestseller List (New York Times 2010). While Gingrich ultimately failed to secure the 2012 Republican nomination, he won primaries in both Georgia and South Carolina before dropping out of the race due to struggles with fundraising (Gibson 2012). While detractors contend that books by politicians are rarely read, they constitute a part of the increasingly insulated political media ecosystem. Books allow politicians and public figures to present a narrative oriented towards a particular audience willing to accept their claims. While scholars in rhetoric traditionally focus on political speeches, by examining *To Save America*, I hope to demonstrate how political books might reveal new insight into the nature of political discourse (Rhodes and Hlavacik 2015; Medhurst 2009).

In *Moral Politics*, Lakoff contends that "conservatives understand the moral dimensions of our politics better than liberals do," and because of that "they have been able not only to gain political victories but to use politics in the service of a much larger moral and cultural agenda for America" (Lakoff 2002, 18). As Spielvogel (2006) has argued, rhetoricians can expand their understanding of how morality is used in political discourse by recognizing moral values as a frame. "When used in political discourse, frames rooted in moral values invite audiences to interpret political issues and programs based on their own deeply rooted cultural standard of what is considered right or wrong in human conduct, action, and character" (Spielvogel 2006, 551). While Lakoff's work has been taken up by rhetoricians to some extent, its potential for explaining how worldview influences politics remains underutilized (Hayden 2003; Spielvogel 2006; Cisneros 2008). Throughout this essay, I demonstrate the ways in which Lakoff's theory of moral politics provides insight into how moral appeals can be used to polarize political discourse. If our politics are rooted in our worldviews, then understanding how politicians appeal to their audience through those views is essential to understanding contemporary politics.

We Need "Traditional" Values to Save America

In the introduction of To Save America, Gingrich writes that "Traditional America values hard work, entrepreneurship, innovation, and merit-based upward mobility," this is contrasted with the idea of secular-socialism, or the American political left, which "rewards its members and punishes 'overachievers,' kills jobs by over-taxing small businesses, and even exploits your death to tax the savings you hope to pass on to your children and grandchildren" (Gingrich 2010, 2). Beginning in his introduction, Gingrich contrasts "traditional American values" with the values of the secular-socialists, implying that secular-socialists are not "real" Americans. Moreover, the American values he identifies hard work, entrepreneurship, innovation, and merit-

based upward mobility, closely correspond to the conservative categories of moral action which Lakoff identifies. Hard work and merit-based upward mobility are variations of the promotion of self-disciplined, self-reliant people (Lakoff 2002). However, the weight of Gingrich's claim does not come from the traditional values that Americans hold, but rather how they are contrasted against the secular-socialists who want to punish overachievers and impose the "death tax" to deprive your children and grandchildren of their share of your inheritance. The idea of punishing overachievers is in direct contrast to the idea of upholding the morality of reward and punishment through ensuring punishment for a lack of self-discipline, one of the categories of conservative moral action Lakoff identifies (2002, 163). Thus, Gingrich conveys the values of traditional Americans not only by identifying them, but also through contrasting them with the values of secular-socialists.

In Chapter One, "Who We Are," in which Gingrich contrasts "traditional" American values with the values of the secular-socialists, he writes that: "Overall, the fundamental definition of what it means to be American is being undermined and distorted by the values, attitudes, and actions of the secular socialist machine" (2010, 6). This strategy is similar to the strategy of attacking the accuser, which Valenzano and Edwards (2012) identified in Gingrich's performance during the 2012 Republican primary debate. In that instance, as in this one, Gingrich uses his audience as a "synecdoche for the rest of the country" (Valenzano and Edwards, 2012, 37). By conflating "traditional" American values with conservative values, Gingrich encourages his audience to identify those who do not share their "traditional," (i.e., conservative) values as un-American. The idea that the "fundamental definition" of what it means to be American is being undermined, also reflects the metaphor of moral wholeness, which in Strict Father morality requires that there are "natural, strict, uniform, unchanging

standards of behavior that must be followed if society is to function" (Lakoff 2002, 90). Moral wholeness requires social homogeneity, a requirement which in part explains conservative opposition to immigration. For this reason, anything that deviates from the norms identified within Strict Father morality departs from the wholeness that is a uniform morality. For those whose conceptual system aligns with Strict Father morality, homogeneity is necessary for society to continue working properly; anything which threatens to undermine this morality, such as the secular-socialism Gingrich identifies, has the potential to corrupt our society.

This belief is further exemplified by the fact that Gingrich writes that these two world views are "irreconcilable," and "in the long run, cannot coexist in the American system" (2010, 7). Eventually, "one of these value systems will defeat and replace the other" (Gingrich 2010, 7). The struggle between traditional American values and the values of secular-socialism is thus presented as a battle with only one winner. Gingrich effectively uses the idea of moral wholeness, which suggests that the world is strictly divided between good and evil, to position his beliefs (and his readers) in contrast to those held by the secular-socialists. In contrast to Nurturant Parent Morality, which emphasizes empathy, Strict Father Morality prizes the pursuit of self-interest, making collective action through empathy difficult; each battle fought is existential (Hayden 2003). For those influenced by Strict Father morality, "there is no such thing as progress in morality; what is and is not moral is fixed for all time, and any change of standards in the name of would-be moral progress is really an evil" (Lakoff 2002, 92). Those trying to change the values system, secular-socialists, are evil, because progress is not possible in morality; there is only what is and is not moral. Many of Gingrich's arguments, even those not explicitly connected to morality, are in fact based on a moral system.

Secularism

However, Gingrich's discussion of morality is often overt, particularly in relation to the "secularism" which he argues is at the heart of the left's agenda. Here, secularism is defined as "an explicitly anti-religious outlook expressed in the policies designed to ban all religious expression from the public square" (Gingrich 2010, 29). In Strict Father morality, the metaphor of Moral Order dictates that God has a responsibility to care for human-beings, much like adults have a responsibility for the well-being of children (Lakoff 2002, 82). In fact, Gingrich affirms this idea, writing that "our subordination to God sets boundaries for what we can and should do to ourselves and others" (2010, 30). Therefore, "chasing religion from the public square inevitably leads to lower public morality" (Gingrich 2010, 31). In this moral system, removing God from the public square is a subversion of the moral order, and the consequences of that action are lower public morality, or less good and more evil.

In support of his claim about lower public morality, Gingrich provides a list of the problems affecting teenagers. He argues that they have all risen since 1963, the year that the Supreme Court banned mandated prayer in public schools, due to the practice's violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment (Sch. Dist. of Abington Twp, Pa. v. Schempp 1963). The list of problems that have risen since 1963 includes: teenage pregnancy, assault on teachers, drug addiction, "rape in schools," and the "display of disrespectful attitudes" (Gingrich 2010, 32). Aside from failing to specify what constitutes a "display of disrespectful attitude," Gingrich provides no citations for these claims, a strategy used by conservatives to protect the plausibility of anecdotal evidence, as it makes claims harder for critics to disprove (Ricci 2011). Moreover, the implicit claim that these problems are related to the lack of prayer in schools is one based on correlation rather than causation, meaning that no direct evidence exists to prove a lack of prayer led to the rise in "displays of disrespectful attitudes." This is another conservative

rhetorical strategy, as it is easy to accept for those predisposed to similar beliefs but is difficult for critics to disprove (Ricci 2011). The connection between a lack of prayer in schools and a rise in the problems affecting teenagers is based on mistaking correlation for causation. This assumption, however, makes Gingrich's argument more compelling rather than less so, strengthening his claim that the lack of religion, ostensibly forced upon the country by Democrats, causes lower public morality.

The rhetoric of secularism in *To Save America* is reminiscent of the rhetoric of <family values> ideograph identified by Cloud (1998), in that it is situated somewhere between a yearning for utopia and scapegoating. Secularism, according to Gingrich, "does not consider the implications of one's actions beyond the impact they may have on one's own life. It does not recognize any higher moral order beyond that which human beings have rationally developed" (2010, 37). Unlike the "traditional" American values which service and faith in God's principles, secularism encourages the pursuit of individual desire. By blaming Democrats as the enforcers of secularism while simultaneously praising days gone by, Gingrich uses the party as a scapegoat while simultaneously advocating for a return to "traditional" values, similarly to who laud <family values> (Cloud 1998). This argument presupposes that there can be no morality without religion, but the issue at stake for Gingrich is the establishment clause of the Constitution which states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion" (U.S. Constitution, Amdt. I, §3).

When Gingrich argues that "religion" is under attack, he uses this as coded language for the traditional value system he believes is under attack. What's interesting is that, in his argument for returning religion to the public square, Gingrich only accounts for instances where Christianity has been "under attack" by the secularists. While there is a basic misconception that

"the legal separation of church from state means the same thing as separating religion from politics" (Medhurst 2009, 211), what Gingrich is arguing for here is not that religion has a place in politics, but that religion has a place in our government. This is because Gingrich equates religion with traditional values, a belief demonstrated when he writes that: "Traditionally, America has been a religious society based on our fundamental belief that there is something out there larger than ourselves" (Gingrich 2010, 30). Traditional values, then, are taught through a religious system that requires obedience to God through moral strength, self-discipline, and self-denial (Lakoff 2002). For Gingrich, religion guides morality because "if you are subordinate to God then by definition you are subordinate to rules that transcend your own ego and personal appetites" (2010, 32). "Teach[ing] conservative morality and the conservative notion of character, starting with self-discipline" is important because "this is called conservative morality" (Lakoff 2002, 233-234). The claim that returning religion to the public square is important for public morality is a coded mechanism for the claim that teaching conservative morality is good for public morality.

Socialism

As part of a long tradition of conservatives, Gingrich frames "socialism" within the phrase "secular-socialist" as a moral issue. Since Reagan, the original free-market conservative, transformed the free market from a "natural, chaotic, self-interested system" into a "moral system designed to allow each individual to fulfill his or her obligations to self, God, and others" (Kunde 2019, 218), arguing for the morality of the free market–and, by extension, the immorality of socialism–has become standard Republican fare. Kunde (2019) writes that Reagan rhetorically constructed a covenantal economy in which faith in God became the cornerstone for three central economic policies: "a free market economy with limited government interference, lower taxes,

and spending cuts that reduced funding for welfare programs" (218). Through rhetoric that frames the free market as the will of God, conservatives are able to reconcile their religious beliefs with economic self-interest. Within Strict Father morality, "taxation of the rich is…punishment for doing what is right and succeeding at it" (Lakoff 2002, 189). Taxation is a metaphorical form of punishment; therefore, taxing the rich acts as a disincentive for wealth accumulation because it is punishment for a "good" deed. It should come as no surprise, then, that the subsection of *To Save America* which discusses the "socialist" Left is titled "Socialism: Spreading the Failure Around" (Gingrich 2010, 41).

Much like Reagan framed entrepreneurs as people who not only provided the "necessary faith and energy to keep the free-market operating," but also "but they extended their hearts and hands to provide jobs, or moral and economic opportunity" (Kunde 2019, 235) to those outside of the covenantal economy, Gingrich positions "socialist" policies as hindering individual participation in the free-market by taking away autonomy and freedom of choice. For Gingrich, socialism and capitalism are metaphorical foils. Capitalism represents hard work, self-reliance, and self-discipline, otherwise known as "traditional" American values. Socialism is a metaphor for laziness, dependence on the government, and the collapse of these "traditional" values. *To Save America* defines socialism as policies that "favor increased central planning of the economy by politicians and bureaucrats instead of allowing entrepreneurs, businesses, and customers to make decisions in the free market" (Gingrich 2010, 42). The contrast between politicians and bureaucrats versus entrepreneurs and customers places emphasis on the individualism that dominates the free market narrative.

Socialists, Gingrich writes, "favor these methods because they insist on equality of *results*, rather than the traditional American belief in equality *under the law*" (2010, 42;

emphasis original). Gingrich contrasts the entitlement associated with equality of *results* with equality *under the law*, a phrase resonant of the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause. The substitution of the preposition "under" for "before" the law, symbolizes the Strict Father morality which conceives of the nation as a family and its government as the father (Lakoff 2002). The word "before" implies equality of the father and child, which does not exist in Strict Father morality, whereas "under" asserts the domination of the father. The phrase "equality of results" is problematic for Gingrich's audience because policies that favor taxing the rich and funding social programs suggests that "undeserving" people will benefit from the fruits of their labor. In conservative thought, social programs amount to coddling people because instead of becoming self-reliant, they learn to depend on government benefits (Lakoff 2002). This makes them morally weak because they lack the self-discipline and willpower so highly prized in conservative morality; this moral weakness is a form of immorality (Lakoff 2002). Conservative economic rhetoric privileges the individual agent, an idea which is rhetorically linked to values of personal responsibility (Martin 2015). By positioning socialists as favoring equality of results rather than the "traditional American belief" of equality under the law, Gingrich establishes for his audience that the "secular-socialists," otherwise known as Democrats, actively work against traditional American values. This makes them un-American– and therefore–enemies.

Why "Secular-Socialism" Matters Now

By positioning citizens with "traditional" American values against the secular-socialist left, Gingrich creates a framework that positions "real" Americans against "fake" Americans. According to Gingrich, the secular-socialist left wants to "use government power to change who we are and how we think" (2010, 2). Secular-socialists are a danger to "our" values because: "if you're part of a movement that believes it knows better than the American people what's best for

them, you inherently scorn the values and judgment of the people you intend to change" (Gingrich 2010, 46). The idea that secular-socialists "inherently scorn the values and judgment" of the people they intend to change denotes the all-or-nothing thinking that Gingrich implicitly encourages his audience to buy into. This is a form of demagoguery because it reduces complex policy issues to matters of identity by employing a "binary of us (good) versus them (bad) thinking" (Roberts-Miller 2017, 8). While demagoguery exists on a continuum rather than as a form of discrete discourse, its harm can be measured by "how widespread is the scapegoating of that out-group, and how widespread or powerful are the media or individuals who are promoting the demagoguery" (Roberts-Miller 2019, 149). When Gingrich constructs the phrase "secular-socialists," it does not serve as a legitimate representation of the Democratic policy agenda, but as the "them" he needed to galvanize supporters. In doing so, he uses the opposing political party as a scapegoat and directs the in-group, his readers and supporters, to do the same. By positioning "them" as attempting to "impose alien values on us," Gingrich frames the issue as nothing less than "an effort to save America" (2010, 56).

The phrase "secular-socialism" is used as a metaphor for "them" because it enables Gingrich and his supporters to dismiss the values and beliefs of everyone who is not "us." As I have shown, religion and capitalism hold moral value within the conservative moral order. Collectives construct their group morality through various forms of public discourse that utilizes its capacity to "create, extend, and apply moral concepts" (Condit 1987, 93). "If 'moral values' are shaping political power, then conservatives continue to win national elections not just on their strategic use of culture war 'wedge' issues but,…on the strength of a highly diffused and coherent moral frame within which Democrats are forced to reason" (Spielvogel 2006, 566). By portraying secular-socialists as trying to destroy traditional American values, *To Save America*

participates in reshaping conservative morality into one that refuses to recognize a worldview different from its own.

Conclusion

To Save America uses the phrase "secular-socialism" to frame Democrats and the political left as un-American by depicting them through a lens that is alien to Strict Father morality. By placing "secular-socialism" in contrast to "traditional" American values, Gingrich creates a paradigm in which the two positions are irreconcilable. Therefore, supporting "secular-socialist" policies and beliefs is not only morally incorrect, but also unpatriotic. While this analysis has focused primarily on the ways in which *To Save America* frames secular-socialism as an attack on "traditional" American values, it is important to note that Gingrich is not out of line with fellow conservatives. His use of the phrase "secular-socialism" is a reflection of the larger conservative media strategy which portrays politics as "a broader battle between left and right over the scope of government, the direction of society, and American strength in the world" (Jarvis 2021, 18).

As I have argued previously, by contrasting the phrase "secular-socialism" with "traditional" American values, Gingrich effectively appeals to the moral systems of his audience. Since, as Lakoff notes, "it is assumed that language is neutral, that words are just arbitrary labels for literal ideas" (2002, 385), the term "secular-socialism" and its relationship to literal ideas, occludes the fact that Gingrich is indeed appealing to the moral systems of his audience. His use of this language reinforces notions in the conservative conceptual system about what Democrats believe in and stand for. The political conceptual systems Lakoff (2002) outlines in *Moral Politics* are illuminating because they provide broader insight into how politicians can subtly appeal to moral values through their use of framing. While this essay has not focused directly on

policy proposals, I believe that, as others have noted, Lakoff's conception of moral politics can be used by rhetoricians to deconstruct the coded moral values across various types of political discourse. Moreover, this analysis also reveals how conservatives used moral discourse to promote political polarization during the rise of the Tea Party movement, indicating that polarizing rhetoric has been a feature of conservative political discourse since at least 2010.

The Strict Father conceptual system that structures conservative worldviews provides insight into the way that Gingrich structures his argument about secular-socialism and why that might appeal to his audience. By presenting the two concepts, secularism and socialism, as fundamentally opposed to the conservative worldview, he uses moral appeals to contrast "traditional" American values with the values of secular-socialism. In doing so, he creates an us versus them dichotomy that raises the stakes beyond that of mere politics. It is a battle *to save America*.

Sarah Palin

Sarah Palin's second book, titled *America by Heart: Reflections on Faith, Family, and Flag* (2010) ostensibly illuminates her view of America and the role of government in the country. However, the book's central focus is an appeal to the values presumably held by Palin, her audience, and potential supporters. The title reflects a variation of the phrase "take the country by storm." By naming the book *America by Heart*, Palin suggests the idea of "heart" to a reader, and the implications that "heart" holds are those rooted in values. Indeed, this is reflected in the subtitle, as faith, family, and flag represent three of the concrete values used to appeal to represent the conservative vision of America. In the introduction, Palin writes that "The left seems to think that there's something wrong with America–not something wrong with our policies or our government, but something wrong with our country and what we value…They

don't seem to share the timeless values that so many of us hold dear" (Palin 2010, xiv). Palin's reliance on values, particularly on the values that supposedly distinguish the political left and right serves to gain adherence from her audience while simultaneously characterizing those who do not share those values as the "other." Palin attempts to move her audience towards action by delineating the values of the left and right, writing that the left does not share the values "our belief in our God-given freedom, our faith in free markets, and our certainty that the truths of our American founding are the way to a more perfect union" (2010, xiv). Her use of the word "our" further characterizes the left as a foreign "other," suggesting that those who–supposedly–do not share those values are not "real" Americans.

Throughout *America by Heart*, Sarah Palin presents herself as a conservative model citizen by integrating anecdotes from her own life with principles from America's founding documents. According to Lakoff, conservative model citizens are individuals who "(1) have conservative values and act to support them; (2) who are self-disciplined and self-reliant; (3) who uphold the morality of reward and punishment; (4) who work to protect moral citizens; and (5) who act in support of the moral order" (2002, 169). Palin presents herself as a conservative model citizen beginning in her introduction, where she writes "...I keep my internal compass pointed due north, to where my roots are. My faith and my family are my greatest sources of support. They are my true north" (2010, xvii). While this idea is relatively innocuous, the following paragraph clarifies what Palin sees as the difference between herself and "What I've come to realize is that, as a country, our true north is the values and principles on which we were founded–those values that are under attack today" (2010, xvii). This crystallizes the idea that Palin hopes to persuade her audience of–those who value family and faith are fundamentally different from those who have supposedly strayed from these founding principles. Throughout

the body of *America by Heart*, Palin expounds on this difference by presenting relatable anecdotes from her own life and relating them back to principles from the country's founding documents. These values, such as self-discipline, hard work, tenacity, self-reliance, and morality are relatable to the reader. By linking these values to founding principles, *America by Heart* conflates a particular value set with a strict interpretation of the constitution, and therefore, with conservative values.

The importance of family and its relationship to a set of moral values is demonstrated throughout *America by Heart*, particularly in a discussion of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. Hurricane Katrina, according to Palin, "revealed something other than government incompetence. It revealed a population of Americans dependent on government and incapacitated by the destruction of the American family" (2010, 114). She continues, writing: "In New Orleans, as in so many American cities, this lack of fathers translated into high crime rates (New Orleans's murder rate was four times the average for similar-sized cities in the year before Katrina), rampant drug abuse, educational failure, and chronic welfare dependency" (Palin 2010, 114-15). This language is related to the dog-whistle racism Haney-López (2014) identifies. Palin phrasing hints that she attributes these matters to causation (fatherlessness causes crime and drug addiction) rather than correlation (fatherlessness and crime follow a similar pattern but are not proven to be directly related issues). After making this point, Palin praises the infamous Moynihan Report–which concluded that the absence of nuclear families was the cause of problems reported by inner-city African Americans–before claiming that "Moynihan was savaged by Washington liberals and accused of racism and blaming the victim" (Palin 2010, 116). By claiming that fatherlessness is responsible for the poverty and crime experienced by Americans who live in inner cities, the majority of whom are people of color, Palin upholds the

Morality of Reward and Punishment (Lakoff 2002). Single mothers must accept their punishment for not raising children in two-parent households, meaning that the consequences are living in poverty. The reward, then, would be the American Dream, which is only possible if an individual is part of a stable, two-parent family.

Much of Palin's rhetoric in *America by Heart* and elsewhere is epideictic, particularly in relation to discussions of policy. Epideictic rhetoric attempts to appeal to a "universal order, to a nature, or a god that would vouch for the unquestioned, and supposedly unquestionable, values" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 51). As Boser and Lake argue in an analysis of Palin's speech, "America's Enduring Strength" after the 2011 Tucson mass-shooting, Palin's rhetoric is epideictic in nature (2014, 623). They write that while "epideictic's essential function, to bind people together by increasing adherence to shared values, is vital to a viable society," in the case of "America's Enduring Strength," Palin uses epideictic rhetoric to suppress judgment by severing the attitudes it promotes from material events, thereby cementing purely affective bonds that are unaccountable to public reason (Boser and Lake 2014, 639-40). In a refutation of those who accused the Tea Party of racism, Palin (2010, 23-24) writes: "The purpose of this charge isn't to clarify but to confuse. It's thrown out there to shut down the debate by declaring one side of it (dissenters from the Obama agenda) unworthy of being taken seriously…Conservatives and liberals don't have honest policy disagreements, this strategy says; conservatives are just bad people." In this instance, the material conditions of the Birther movement and its connection to the Tea Party are severed from reality, and the audience is assured that charges of racism are instead connected to a (supposed) liberal insistence that "conservatives are just bad people." Palin uses epideictic rhetoric to reassure her audience that it is liberals who are at fault by framing Tea Party conservatives as concerned with "honest policy disagreements" rather than the

racism they have been charged with. Epideictic's use of universal, unquestionable values "results in its being practiced by those who, in a society, defend the traditional and accepted values," as Palin does with her focus on "God-given rights" and traditional values (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 51).

Palin's discussion of traditional values echoes the rhetoric of <family values> identified by Cloud (1998). <Family values> is an ideograph, "an ideological slogan with a deep history and enormous cultural resonance" (Cloud 1998, 389), used by politicians to promote a specific ideology. In the case of <family values>, that ideology is one of the privatization of responsibility that scapegoats certain groups while simultaneously imagining a utopia (Cloud 1998). After discussing her family, Palin (2010, 123) writes: "But while my family has been busy growing and developing, America and the American family have been under almost continuous assault." She continues, "...at the same time they are busy downplaying the importance of the traditional family, liberals are busy expanding government in the name of 'the children'" (Palin 2010, 123). While these sentences do not directly use the phrase "family values," they promote an ideology of self-reliance and privatization that could result in a utopia, while scapegoating those seen as undermining efforts to reach this goal–including liberals, non-traditional families, and unwed single mothers, among other groups.

This liberal attitude contrasts with Strict Father morality because it believes that the government should help families care for their children, rather than placing all of the responsibility upon individuals. For this reason, the liberal agenda is seen as furthering conservative demons, or "those nightmare citizens who, by their very nature, violate or or more of the conservative moral categories" (Lakoff 2002, 170), because these policies are both against conservative values and can be construed as condoning the behavior of those who lack self-

discipline, such as unwed mothers on welfare (Lakoff 2002, 170-71). In general, conservative demons are individuals who do not uphold conservative values, including feminists and gays, because their beliefs are in direct conflict with the conservative moral order (Lakoff 2002).

Feminism is an affront to Palin's values because, as she writes, "modern feminism's idea of a 'real' woman isn't so much a woman as a liberal…In the name of liberating women, modern feminism has wrapped us in a one-size-fits-all straitjacket of political correctness" (Palin 2010, 135). This claim builds off of assumptions about modern feminism that have been constructed in the media and contributes to the idea that feminists are actively working to destroy the traditional family. Instead, she claims that:

> It's actually the liberal women's groups that have little in common with the majority of American women. Most women love their families and cherish motherhood. But all too often the leaders of the modern feminist movement seem disdainful of traditional family life and the joys and fulfillment we find in motherhood. (Palin 2010, 136)

Palin's argument against feminisms adheres to Lakoff's claim that "feminists, gays, and other 'deviants' are at the top of the list [of conservative demons], since they condemn the very nature of the Strict Father family" (2002, 170). The Strict Father family originates from the metaphor of Moral Order which "legitimates a certain class of power relations as being natural and therefore moral, and thus makes social movements like feminism appear unnatural and therefore counter to the moral order" (Lakoff 2002, 82).

Palin defends the moral order she adheres to by attacking women who violate those moral principles, including Hillary Clinton, writing that Clinton "told us in no uncertain terms that she 'could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas' but preferred to pursue a serious career'" (Palin 2010, 136). "*Well, Hillary*," Palin continues, "*some of us like to bake cookies.*

Some of us also think we can do that and still have successful careers. And most of us don't think we have to run down stay-at-home moms in order to make ourselves feel good about our choices" (Palin 2010, 136; emphasis original). Writing in 2010, Palin brings up this comment made by Clinton nearly two decades earlier (Kruse 2016) to demonstrate that liberal women not only are unsupportive of traditional families, but actively disdain women who embody those ideals. Palin uses the quote from Clinton to draw a distinction between herself, who she presents throughout the book as a caring wife and mother, and condescending feminists who do not bake cookies for their families, an idea which can easily be substituted for "bad wives and mothers who do not care about their families." Hillary Clinton is the "demon-of-all-demons for conservatives" because she violates all five categories of the conservative moral order (Lakoff 2002, 171). To conservatives, Clinton is an "uppity woman," (171) who opposes the moral order (Category 5), a "former anti war activist who is pro-choice" (171-172) who therefore fails to "protect moral people from external evils" (163) (Category 4); and a "protector of the 'public good'" (Lakoff 2002, 172) who does not uphold the morality of reward and punishment (Category 3). Clinton is "someone who gained her influence not on her own but through her husband" meaning she does not promote self-discipline, self-reliance, or responsibility (Category 2), and as a "supporter of multiculturalism," she fails to promote Strict Father morality in general (Category 1) (Lakoff 2010, 172). Moreover, Palin's response to Hillary Clinton's unfortunate comment engages in demagoguery by using a rhetoric of victimization (Roberts-Miller 2017) to contrast "real" women who "*like to bake cookies*" and "*still have successful careers*" (Palin 2010, 136) with liberal women who "*have to run down stay-at-home moms*" to make themselves "*feel good about [their] choices*" (Palin 2010, 136). The rhetoric of victimization portrays the in-group as responding to their "victimization with extraordinary patience and kindness," (Roberts-

Miller 2017, 61) as Palin does in her response to Clinton's comment.

America By Heart (Palin 2010) further engages in demagoguery with regard to discussions of feminism and abortion by displacing policy argumentation with issues of identity (Roberts-Miller 2017). Using the "*identity as logic*" (Roberts-Miller 2017, 49) argument, Palin (2010, 151) writes that "affirming the dignity and worth of every innocent human life and defending the defenseless are fundamental American values." This argument substitutes identity for logic by implying that this set of values is universal among Americans and those who do not share this value set are not like the rest of us, and by extension are not *truly* American. Palin persists in her demagoguery by writing that "liberal feminism tells American women that they can't value life and call themselves women" (2010, 151).

Lakoff argues that liberals think and talk about abortions in terms of a medical procedure while conservatives "think and talk about them in terms of killing babies" (2002, 265). Moreover, the stereotypes of women who choose to get abortions fall into two categories, both of which violate the conservative moral order: unmarried teenage girls who choose to have sex but fail to use appropriate contraception and women who want to pursue careers and independent lives whose aspirations would be blighted by having a baby at that point in their lives (Lakoff 2002). In the first instance, the teenage girl who had sex submitted to a "moral weakness, a lack of self-discipline, a form of immoral behavior" (Lakoff 2002, 267) and she should be held responsible for the consequence of her actions; "an abortion would simply sanction her immoral behavior" (Lakoff 2002, 267). Women who choose to have abortions in order to pursue their careers violate the conservative moral order that places men in leadership positions and dictates women's role as taking care of the family (Lakoff 2002). Lakoff argues that "once Strict Father morality chooses opposition to abortion and, with it, the use of the 'baby' frame, that choice

functions to reinforce the Strict Father model itself" (2002, 268). Much of Palin's (2010) opposition to abortion is also derived from her religious beliefs, and she writes about praying when she found out that her youngest son, Trig, would be born with autism.

Religion is thus linked with fortitude and strength, the very same values that Palin claims liberals are attempting to remove from public life. Without these values and by extension, the Christian religion, Americans would be morally corrupt. Therefore, attempts to enforce the separation of church and state is akin to advocating for immorality which in turn would cause American decline. Since a particular set of moral beliefs—which conservatives consider the only *correct* set of beliefs—such as valuing life via pro-life policies, are linked to religiosity, to "remove religion from the public square" is an attempt to force America into immorality. Immorality, in turn, is linked to America's declining place in the world order and contributes to the sense that the country "is moving in the wrong direction." These ideas work in tandem to persuade the audience that separation of church and state is not only wrong but is ruining the country.

Uniting Messages

Unlike some of her counterparts, Palin uses the conclusion of *America by Heart* (2010) to attempt at uniting readers rather than dividing them. This, however, does not prevent her from taking aim at then President Obama or other politicians in Washington who "don't share this fundamental view of American greatness" (Palin 2010, 262). This fundamental view of American greatness is central to Palin's (2010) self-defined political philosophy of "commonsense constitutional conservativism" (267) which she views as aligned with the Tea Party movement. However, she also counsels that the way to take "this great awakening among the American people and turn it into a positive force for reclaiming our country and our heritage"

(Palin 2010, 266-67) is not necessarily through a manifesto or the creation of a new political party. Instead, "we just need to honor what our country is and was meant to be" (267). These values, of course, are more closely aligned with the Republican Party, of which Palin has been a member since 18 (Palin 2010).

The difference between these factions is that "if Democrats are driving the country toward socialism at a hundred miles per hour, while the Republicans are driving at only fifty, commonsense constitutional conservatives want to turn the car around. We want to get back to the basics that have made this country great—the fundamental values of family, faith, and flag" (Palin 2010, 267-68). This sentiment is an example of discrediting the opposition through both the positive and negative faces of moral conflict (Hunter 1991). Palin (2010) uses the negative face to discredit the opposition by accusing Democrats of "driving the country towards socialism at a hundred miles per hour" before employing the positive face to articulate the way that commonsense conservatives believe things should be. However, by invoking the "fundamental values of faith, family, and flag," Palin also engages in a strategy of *monopolizing the symbols of legitimacy* (Hunter 1991) by depicting commonsense constitutional conservatives as "defenders of the institutions and traditions of American life while depicting the opposition as foes" (Hunter 1991, 147). Each of these symbols represent both concrete and abstract values (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969) and, through their invocation, the Palin demonstrates an allegiance to the symbols of faith, family, and flag as well as the values they represent.

American Values and American Exceptionalism

"More times than not, if you try to say something nice about our country, you're accused of being a close-minded nativist, one of those dangerous hicks clinging to her guns, her God, and her country" (Palin 2010, 61). This quote seems to be in reference to then-presidential candidate

Barack Obama's comment in 2008 that working-class voters in formerly industrial towns "get bitter. They cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations" (Pilkington 2008). By calling back to this quote, Palin positions herself as a "true" American because she has nice things to say about our country. She contrasts herself with Obama, and the liberal mindset that he stands for through embellishment and irony. However, this quote also betrays her clever use of the metaphor of moral essence, or the more general notion of character (Lakoff 2002). In Strict Father Morality, "to attribute a moral essence to someone is to make a moral judgment about that person in general, not just a judgment about a single act" (Lakoff 2002, 88). Palin uses a play on Obama's quote to portray the left as believing a particular narrative about the moral essence of conservatives. In doing so, she employs irony to embellish and prove her point about the absurdity of the claim.

However, many of Palin's beliefs—which are clearly unironic—also demonstrate an adherence to the metaphor of moral essence. For example, she writes that: "when it comes to raising good citizens, all 'lifestyle choices' are *not* equal" (Palin 2010, 117; emphasis mine). The reader here is left to assume that her quote is in reference to LGBTQ+ families or single-parent families. This presumes that 'lifestyle choices' affect whether parents will raise "good citizens," otherwise known as conservatives. For Palin (2010), children growing up to become "good citizens" is dependent upon not how they were raised, but who raised them because the presumption is that these immoral individuals are not capable of teaching their children the values that *Palin* believes are important. That is, individuals raised in particular settings are assumed not to put the heritage of our country "to work by raising our families, building our communities, creating our prosperity, and defending our freedom that has truly made our country

special" (Palin 2010, 72). Through the concept of moral authority (Lakoff 2002), these values are also linked to conservative votes because conservatives believe that all other moral systems are actually immoral. The categorization as a "good citizen" is not only contingent upon how someone was raised, but on how they vote as adults. It is also important to note that single mothers and LGBTQ+ individuals historically vote for Democrats (Cillizza 2013; GLAAD 2024). These voting choices are what Palin would consider result of poor values, meaning that those individuals could not be trusted to raise "good citizens" in the way conservative logic defines it.

In her chapter entitled "Raising Small r-Republicans," Palin (2010) sets out to assert the importance of the family in relation to the American system of democracy. The role of family is central to the culture wars because "if the symbolic significance of the family is that it is a microcosm of the larger society…then the task of defining what the American family is becomes integral to the very task of defining America itself" (Hunter 1991, 177). For this reason, Palin (2010) invokes the founders in support of her argument about the role of family in American life, writing that "the Founders simply took it for granted that a republic relies on informed and virtuous citizens, and that informed and virtuous citizens are created in turn by strong families" (Palin 2010, 109). As an example of the importance of strong families, Palin (2010) claims that while families all along the Gulf Coast were impacted by Hurricane Katrina, those in New Orleans seemed to struggle the most. The reason for this is the fact that: "in many cases, the difference was strong, intact families—the families our Founders deemed essential to the success of our republic." (Palin 2010, 115). In fact, people in New Orleans suffered the most because the levees failed due to poor engineering by the Army Corps of Engineers (Robertson and Schwartz 2015) and because those most affected by the hurricane and failed levees Hurricane Katrina were

overwhelmingly poor, many could not afford to evacuate (Gonzalez 2005). While Palin's (2010) claim that suffering in aftermath of Hurricane Katrina was the result of weak families could be construed as relatively innocuous, any attempts at plausible deniability are undermined by her following point. When Daniel Patrick Moynihan "issued a famous report warning of the impact on African Americans from the rise of out-of-wedlock births" (Palin 2010, 115) forty-five years ago, he was accused of racism (Palin 2010). In fact, Palin claims, Moynihan was just trying to emphasize the importance of the family even though "standing up for the family wasn't fashionable then and it is even less fashionable now" (Palin 2010, 116). Aside from the racism imbued in claims that individuals in New Orleans died because they lacked "strong, intact families," this also blames victims for their suffering by suggesting they could have done something to prevent the tragedies and devastation they suffered.

The idea that the suffering caused by Hurricane Katrina can be directly attributed to a breakdown of the family is not only an example of substituting correlation for causation, as conservatives are wont to do (Ricci 2011), but also refuses to recognize that individuals in New Orleans *were* part of families. This is because defenders of the "traditional family" are intent on defending a "certain *idealized* form of the nineteenth-century middle-class family: a male-dominated nuclear family that both sentimentalized childhood and motherhood and, at the same time, celebrated domestic life as a utopian retreat from the harsh realities of industrialized society" (Hunter 1991, 180). Palin (2010) admits as when she claims that "the left wants us to believe that any grouping we choose to call a family is worthy of that name" (117).

Conclusion

Made in the GOP's Image

The language and symbols used by the Tea Party arise from questions about who has moral authority in America. Hunter (1991) argues that the culture wars are a fight over who holds the moral authority to dictate cultural issues, writing that ultimately, "it is the commitment to different and opposing bases of moral authority and the world views that derive from them that creates the deep cleavages between antagonists in the contemporary culture war" (Hunter 1991, 43). Lakoff (2002) identifies moral authority as an essential element of Strict Father Morality because, under this belief system, there can only be one correct form of morality. When operating in tandem with the form of moral authority Lakoff (2002) identifies, these opposing bases lead individuals on the political right to believe they are the rightful arbiters of cultural and societal issues. In the context of the Tea Party movement, I understand moral authority to be a combination of these arguments. For conservatives, the culture wars are a battle between good and evil not only because of the "different and opposing bases of moral authority" (Hunter 1991, 43) but because, as Lakoff (2002) identifies, conservatives only recognize one correct form of morality. The culture wars are thus a battle of existential proportions.

While Hunter (1991) identifies moral authority on both the political left and right, it is more appropriate to understand the Tea Party movement as using politics to impose *their* standards of moral authority onto others through a monopolization of symbols and language that implies only one "correct" choice. These differing moral visions lead groups to take polarizing positions in which they believe there can be no middle ground (Hunter 1991). It is in this context, then, that the symbols and moral reasoning used by the Tea Party take on their full meaning.

Donald Trump's Rhetorical Legacy

If not for the foundation lain by the Tea Party movement, Donald Trump would not have descended the escalator in Trump Tower to announce his run for the presidency. More importantly, Trump's rhetoric during his campaign and presidency were a culmination of conservative's "righteous" moral authority. In its most extreme form, this righteousness is used to undermine the will of the people through repeated engagement with the frame of the "real" American. That is, "real" Americans know there is only one righteous choice, one choice that affirms their moral authority—Donald Trump. Former President Trump's term in office culminated in the insurrection on January 6, 2021 because his election was premised on the idea that, in any given scenario, there is one right choice. There is only one set of values; only one kind of person is a "real" American; and only one individual is the rightful president. Therefore, to conceding loss after the 2020 presidential election would mean admitting that none of these beliefs are true.

President Donald Trump's inaugural address, delivered on January 20, 2017, was characterized by the divisive themes that elevated him to the office of the presidency. Although the speech attempts a measure of unity, it also foreshadows the themes that could come to characterize his presidency. After Trump thanks his predecessor, as is customary, he quickly transitions to the symbolism of his election, saying that "today's ceremony, however, has very special meaning" because it is not the transfer of power from one party or administration to another but because "we are transferring power from Washington, D.C. and giving it back to you, the American People" (Trump 2017). In doing so, Trump is able to position himself as a moral authority because he is giving the "immoral" federal government which violates the principles of local knowledge—therefore making it an illegitimate source of moral authority

(Lakoff 2002)—and giving it back to the American people. In this way, Trump twists the metaphor of moral authority (Lakoff 2002) by positioning the citizenry as those holding authority rather than the government. However, his election is actually a gift to the citizens because "only he" can return the power to the people. Trump places himself as the individual who is taking power away from the "illegitimate" authority of the federal government. By doing so, Trump makes himself the ultimate moral authority, because he both knows what is wrong and works to correct it through restoring a sense of justice, otherwise known as retribution for immoral acts (Lakoff 2002).

The subtle theme of moral retribution continues throughout Trump's inauguration address. He tells the audience: "This is your day. This is your celebration. And this, the United States of America, is your country." Although the appeal to morality might be easily to overlooked in this instance, President Trump uses a combination of the metaphor of the moral order and the metaphor of moral wholeness. The metaphor of moral order fits easily with the metaphor of moral authority because it is based on an order of dominance and hierarchy (Lakoff 2002). Here, those who are "real" Americans, as they have been told time and again through the media they consume, are higher in the hierarchy than other Americans. Therefore, "real" Americans possess moral authority to dictate and define how *all* Americans should live and behave. The thinking which allows for a distinction between "real" Americans who hold a particular set of values, and all other Americans is based on the metaphor of moral wholeness. People who are inclined to Strict Father Morality often subscribe to the metaphor of moral wholeness because, for them, "those who engage in deviant behavior, who deviate from those paths and transgress those boundaries, are thus threats to society since they blur the established boundaries between morality and immorality" (Lakoff 2002, 90). In this case, however, since the

metaphors of moral authority and moral order have been repeatedly and effectively used to establish that "real" Americans hold the authority, the metaphor of moral wholeness can be extended to any behavior that furthers the interests of the dominant group.

This dominant group is referred to throughout Trump's address as "a righteous public" and the "forgotten men and women of our country" (Trump 2017). In calling his voters a "righteous public," President Trump affirms for his supporters that their beliefs and actions are morally correct; only they are truly virtuous. He states that "a nation exists to serve its citizens" (Trump 2017). The use of the word "nation" here is interesting because, in contrast to the word "government" or "state," the word "nation" refers not to a governing body but instead to a specific group of people who are united by their common descent, history or culture. Therefore, the idea that "a nation exists to serve its citizens" implies that only citizens who are part of that nation are served. In this case, those citizens are the "real" Americans who have been rhetorically established through the language of "traditional values," symbols of patriotism, and subtle references to religion and a religious state, all of which have been built up over years.

President Trump continues to employ these rhetorical strategies throughout his inaugural address. In one instance, after proclaiming that his administration will "unite the civilized world against Radical Islamic Terrorism," he tells the audience that "at the bedrock of our politics will be a total allegiance to the United States of America" because "when you open your heart to patriotism, there is no room for prejudice" (Trump 2017). He continues, uncharacteristically, by quoting from Psalm 133:1 which reads: "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity" (New International Version). It is a Song of Ascents (Koester 2009) that "imparts blessing and life to God's people" and "proclaims the oneness in faith" (Koester 2009). Psalm 133 is a message of unity, particularly in times of struggle, but its position shortly after a

reference to "Radical Islamic Terrorism" conveys a message that this unity and blessing applies only to a certain group of people who have chosen to "open their heart to patriotism." Only then, once we have opened our hearts and accepted messages of patriotism, are we protected.

Patriotism and membership of a nation are themes central to Trump's messaging, culminating on January 6th, 2021. Speaking to the crowd who had gathered to protest the certification of the 2020 election, President Trump told them: "You're stronger, you're smarter, you've got more going on than anybody. And they try and demean everybody having to do with us. And you're the real people, you're the people that built this nation" (Trump 2021). This is an overt invocation of the metaphor of moral order, in which some people, particularly those who adhere to the model of the American Dream, are considered to possess a higher level of morality than others (Lakoff 2002). These are the "real people" who the country belongs to, as Trump implies in his inaugural address. Similarly to Gingrich and Palin, Trump invokes the idea of real versus fake to distinguish between those who share a particular belief system and those who do not. This is similar to the strategy of us versus them that Roberts-Miller (2017) identifies. However, I would argue that creating categories of "real" Americans versus the implied "fake" Americans takes the strategy of us versus them further, creating a more divisive form of discourse.

In a manner similar to the calls in his inaugural address for a "total allegiance" to the United States, Trump used his speech on January 6th to accuse Congress of committing an "egregious assault on *our* democracy" (Trump 2021; emphasis mine) and tell his supporters that "you'll never take our country back with weakness" (Trump 2021). By repeatedly conjuring up a message of strength, Trump invokes the metaphor of moral strength, in which "morality is conceptualized as strength, as having the *moral fiber* or *backbone* to resist evil" (Lakoff 2002,

71). Of course, the metaphor of moral strength is most compelling when a group feels that their status as "real" Americans is being undermined and discounted. They need moral strength to protect their country because the left, in the words of Palin (2010, xiv), doesn't "seem to share the timeless values that so many of us hold dear." Under these circumstances, then, Trump's supporters believe his message that "you're protecting our country and you're protecting the Constitution" (Trump 2021).

The bleak imagery used in Trump's inaugural address, of an America with "mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation; an education system, flush with cash, but which leave our young and beautiful students deprived of knowledge; and the crime and gangs and drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential" reflects a dark view of America. The language of deprivation, death, and despair signals Trump and his supporters' view that the United States has become "completely infected by progressivism" (Beck 2012, 27). The language of "infection" used by Beck (2012) aligns with the themes of deprivation and despair in Trump's address. They depict the "American carnage" (Trump 2021) that is a result of not prioritizing the values and beliefs of "real" Americans.

Final Thoughts

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated how influential figures associated with the Tea Party movement employed a set of rhetorical strategies that engaged in "us" versus "them" thinking and attempted to portray the political left as attacking American ideals and principles. Language used by key figures in or associated with the Tea Party movement demonstrates broad themes of othering, claiming moral authority through a monopolization of symbols, and a willingness to impose their moral standards onto others. As I have attempted to show, these

strategies are used not in service of bettering the country, but in persuading readers that those who do not share their values are not "real" Americans. Strict Father morality's use of moral boundaries, or the idea that there are only moral and immoral actions, values, and beliefs (Lakoff 2002) creates a dichotomy between those who are moral or "good" and those who are immoral or "bad." This black and white view of the world, when taken to the extreme, leads individuals to believe that if one does not share a particular set of values, they are immoral and "bad." Alone, this thinking can contribute to political polarization, but when coupled with strategies employed by the Tea Party movement, such as monopolizing the symbols of legitimacy (Hunter 1991), members of the public eventually began to conflate belief in a particular moral system with patriotism.

In public discourse, the Constitution has been appropriated through the continuous use of various rhetorical strategies, including repetition, misconstruction of facts, and appeals to fear. By continuously associating the Constitution with the values of obeying authority and following tradition, figures such as Palin (2010) and Gingrich (2012)—among others—eventually persuaded their audience that the Constitution is a physical embodiment of these values. Therefore, a group of people who are perceived to devalue authority and tradition are unpatriotic. The moral system that was imbued upon symbols of patriotism, and the conflation of patriotism with a particular set of values, means that anyone who does not take part in one must not appreciate the other.

This is a partial and somewhat dishonest appropriation because it purposefully misconstrues the meaning and intent located within these symbols. The Preamble to the Constitution states that it aims to "promote the general Welfare" of the American people. That is,

to promote "well-being, prosperity, [and] success" of *all* Americans.[5] However, the Tea Party movement and its successors have intentionally interpreted "welfare" to mean the well-being, prosperity, and success of a *particular* group of Americans. This group consists of individuals who easily conform to the Tea Party ideals of who Americans should be, what they should look like, and the values they should hold. Welfare then comes to mean the success and well-being of one race, ethnicity, gender, or political party at the expense of all others.

Ultimately, this thinking leads to a belief that because the political left does not share the same values and moral system, they must not care about American symbols and the history for which those symbols stand. Moral boundaries and the black or white system of thought categorizes individuals as American or not American. A group of people are not "real" Americans if they do not share these values or appreciate American symbols. The categorization of "real" and not real Americans gives the "real" Americans broad latitude to impose their will upon others. This might involve disregarding tradition, spreading false information about the enemy, uncivil and demagogic discourse, or the conviction that a president who is not a "real" American must have cheated in order to win an election.

Understanding the role that designating individuals as "real" Americans has played in the decline of American democracy provides valuable insights into the nature of democratic discourse and political polarization within the contemporary United States. Moreover, a recognition of these rhetorical strategies creates space for rhetoricians and members of the public to begin the work towards rebuilding a model of civil, deliberative democratic discourse. While this thesis cannot remedy the many ailments within American politics, I hope that it can begin by

[5] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "welfare (n.)," September 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1017737348.

providing insight into how we reached this point. Moreover, I hope that by encouraging a dialogue rooted in empathy and open consideration, we begin the work—one step at a time.

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