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“Where Liberty Reigns and God is Supreme”: The Christian Right and the Tea Party Movement

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Abstract *In this article we argue that the tea party movement is the most conspicuous contemporary vehicle for reconciliation between Christian and economic conservatives. The analysis draws upon participant observation of two recent Christian right events at which the tea party was a central preoccupation. Offering evidence of the dynamics of a shifting framing process, it is argued that the Christian right elites are willing to accommodate strategically the precedence of economic issues but only if these are accompanied by a commitment to familiar Christian right positions on social issues.*

The Tea Party's Christian Grassroots

Much has already been written about the tea party movement that emerged in early 2009 and that endorsed candidates throughout the nation in the 2010 midterm elections. Since its emergence, many commentators have noted tea party organizations' means of financial support, and the roles of some prominent conservative leaders, as grounds for labeling the movement as “astroturf” rather than as a grassroots political movement.¹ However, even many critics recognize in it features of an authentic decentralized grassroots social and political movement that articulates the political goals and sentiments of a significant subset of the American electorate. Many argue that although the tea party is a complicated phenomenon, it is, if only in part, a grassroots movement with connections to other movements in US history.²

¹ Paul Krugman, “Tea Parties Forever,” *New York Times*, April 12, 2009, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/13/opinion/13krugman.html>>. Krugman's assessment was that “the tea parties don't represent a spontaneous outpouring of public sentiment. They're AstroTurf (fake grassroots) events, manufactured by the usual suspects.”

² For example, see commentary from a one-day conference at the University of California, Berkeley in October 2010 entitled “Fractures, Alliances and Mobilizations in the Age of Obama: Emerging Analyses of the ‘Tea Party Movement,’” October 22, 2010; Chip Berlet, “Tea Party Loyalists Biased Against Blacks, Latinos, Immigrants, and Gays,” *Alternet.org*, October 26, 2010, <<http://blogs.alternet.org/speakeasy/2010/10/26/tea-party-loyalists-biased-against-blacks-latinos-immigrants-gays/>>; Peter Montgomery, “Taking the Tea Party Seriously,” *People for the American Way*, October 27, 2010, <<http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/taking-tea-party-seriously>>. In Adele M. Stan's article “7 Myths about the Tea Party,” myth number two is “The Tea Party movement is not an authentic grassroots movement; it's the creation of Astroturf groups.” Stan goes on to acknowledge the important roles of funders, conservative elites, and conservative media in

In this article we argue that the tea party movement can be understood as the most conspicuous contemporary vehicle for reconciliation between social/moral conservatives and economic conservatives.³ We derive support for this proposition from a variety of sources, including journalists' interviews, observations of the movement, and survey research.⁴ For example, The PEW Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life advertised its report on the tea party's agenda, "The Tea Party, Religion, and Social Issues," with the phrase, "supporters are both economic and social conservatives."⁵ PEW Research Center polling finds that, in addition to sharing the economically conservative positions by which the movement is identified, supporters "tend to have conservative opinions . . . about social issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage." In fact, the movement tends to receive "disproportionate support from the ranks of white evangelical Protestants." In its surveys on the movement, PEW finds that tea party supporters are both more socially and economically conservative than Americans as a whole, that supporters are *more* economically conservative than Republicans and "closely resemble Republican voters" on social issues. Survey research also demonstrates that "Americans who support the conservative Christian movement, sometimes known as the religious right, also overwhelmingly support the Tea Party."⁶

Footnote 2 continued

the movement: "The success of FreedomWorks, AFP [Americans for Prosperity] and Fox News in mobilizing the Tea Party movement has brought an army of political operatives and lobbyists to the gates. Taken together, I think of these entities as 'Tea Party, Inc.,' distinct from the grassroots right-wing movement they often successfully mobilize." Adele M. Stan, "7 Myths about the Tea Party," in Don Hazen and Adele M. Stan (eds), *Dangerous Brew: Exposing the Tea Party's Agenda to Take Over America* (San Francisco, CA: AlterNet Books, 2010), p. 32.

³In this article we employ "conservative" to indicate the general ideological positioning of those seeking to conserve the current social, economic, and political structure rather than specifically those associated with the Republican Party. We use the term "economic" conservative to refer to those who would give political priority to economic concerns or fiscal policy issues. We use the qualifying terms "social" and "moral" to refer to those conservatives who would give political priority to the preservation of what they interpret as Judeo-Christian tradition privileging, for example, patriarchy and the heterosexual family model. This is most readily identifiable in American political discourse through the wedge issues of anti-abortion and anti-gay rhetoric but it is not limited to these indicators. When referring to the political elites who are most often the public face of social/moral conservatism, we specify "Christian conservative" as they are most often leaders in Christian tradition and who, despite doctrinal differences, work as political co-belligerents on specific socio-political issues. For more discussion of these identifiers see Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989); Chip Berlet (ed.), *Eyes Right!* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1995).

⁴See Adele M. Stan, "Right Wingers Marching in DC Is Big News—But the Same Old Faces Are Pulling the Strings: The Men Behind the Religious Right Make a Comeback with the Tea Party Movement," *Alternet.org*, September 14, 2009, <http://www.alternet.org/news/142606/right_wingers_marching_in_dc_is_big_news_-_but_the_same_old_faces_are_pulling_the_strings>.

⁵PEW Research Center subscribers receive email newsletters that feature new surveys and publications, and the descriptive phrase about tea party supporters appeared in the February 24, 2011 newsletter.

⁶Scott Clement and John C. Green, "The Tea Party, Religion, and Social Issues," PEW Research Center, February 23, 2011, <<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1903/tea-party-movement-religion-social-issues-conservative-christian>>.

Significant ideological overlap between the tea party and the Christian right arises from the two movements' common pool of activists. Ideas shared across the Christian right and the tea party include hostility to government as amoral, socialist, and an enemy of liberty and belief in the American founding as the providential crucible of American exceptionalism.⁷ However, as we demonstrate below, the success of the tea party movement raises some concern for leaders of the Christian right who want to ensure their prominent position in the Republican Party. Normally, Christian right elites rally the grassroots with rhetoric on social issues, but we call attention to shifts in the framing process that re-articulate and repackage the movement's positions on the relationship between economic and social issues. We demonstrate the perceived value of the tea party movement to Christian conservative elites and map the forms of in-group pedagogy that facilitate Christian conservative participation in the tea party.⁸

Reframing and the Christian Right

Our analysis draws upon participant observation of two Christian right events at which the tea party was a central preoccupation. The autumn of 2010 saw the staging of two major Christian right activist conferences in Washington DC. The first was the debut national conference of Ralph Reed's new organization, the Faith and Freedom Network and Foundation, while the second was the fifth annual Values Voter Summit, sponsored by the Family Research Council and other Christian conservative organizations. At both of these events, the tea party, its prospects, its ideology, the role of social conservative issues and activism in the tea party movement, and anxieties that the tea party movement will mimic the Republican Party in prioritizing economic concerns rather than social issues were consistent underlying preoccupations. Given the findings of other researchers, and our own research before these events, the economic rhetoric ubiquitous at these two events marked a significant reframing of movement priorities.⁹

Drawing attention to the literature concerning framing processes and social movements, Benford and Snow note that, in addition to resource mobilization and processes of political opportunity, framing processes are "a central dynamic in understanding the character and course of social movements."¹⁰ Analyzing framing processes enables an understanding of movement actors as "signifying

⁷The Christian homeschooling movement is a significant source for pedagogy on the providential history of America. For one resource, see Mark A. Beliles and Stephen K. McDowell, *America's Providential History (Including Biblical Principles of Education, Government, Politics, Economics, and Family Life)* (Charlottesville, VA: Providence Foundation, 1991). For more on the theme of American exceptionalism see, for example, Shelby Steele "Obama and the Burden of Exceptionalism," <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111904787404576532623176115558.html?mod=djemEditorialPage_h>.

⁸Marilynn B. Brewer, "The Psychology of Prejudice: Ingroup Love or Outgroup Hate?," *Journal of Social Issues* 55:3 (1999), pp. 429-444; Cynthia Burack, *Sin, Sex and Democracy* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2008).

⁹Burack, *Sin, Sex and Democracy*; D. Michael Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Williams, *God's Own Party*; Clyde Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soldiers* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996); Didi Herman, *The Antigay Agenda: Orthodox Vision and the Christian Right* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹⁰Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000), pp. 611-639, at p. 612. For more on the framing process in

agents actively engage in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists and bystanders or observers."¹¹ Specifically, the discursive process of speech acts selects portions of "reality...assembled, collated and packaged" to produce not a new narrative but one "spliced together and articulated, such that a new angle of vision, vantage point and/or interpretation is provided."¹² In articulating a "peg for linking together various events or issues" a movement might construct a frame bridging two seemingly different issues in order to mobilize across social movements.¹³ These strategic framing processes tap into, embellish, and invigorate values in order to make connections between potential constituents. Within the process of framing, it is possible to note internal framing disputes and instructions regarding "how reality should be presented so as to maximize mobilization."¹⁴ Below we present evidence of such a strategic framing process marking a crucial political moment in which Christian right elites, reeling from the victory of President Obama, began to reassert control over conservative ideology through rhetoric targeting Christian conservative participation in the tea party movement.

Why is it important to trace the emergence and articulation of particular political frames? As Baumgartner notes, "a frame is only effective when others pick it up."¹⁵ The tea party rhetoric that emerged after the Obama election was picked up not only by significant numbers of individuals but also by veterans of the political process. Although tracing such fluid development is not an exact science, it allows us to explain political responses "much better than a focus on individual lobbying tactics."¹⁶ The dynamics of "policy punctuations" are often, according to Baumgartner and Jones, an outcome of shifting political frames.¹⁷ For social movements, re-articulating, and occasionally redefining, frames allows for a more invigorated engagement in the political process for a wider audience. In William Connolly's observations of *Christianity and Capitalism, American Style*, he labels such re-articulation as a "resonance machine." Such an intentional intervention to manufacture resonance is key because: "The right leg of the evangelical movement today is joined at the hip to the left leg of the capitalist juggernaut. Neither leg could hop far unless it was joined to the other."¹⁸ It is our

Footnote 10 continued

particular, see W.A. Gamson, B. Fireman, and S. Rytina, *Encounters with Unjust Authority* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey, 1992).

¹¹ Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements," p. 613; see also David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, "Ideology, Frame Resonance and Participant Mobilization," *International Social Movement Research* 1 (1988), pp. 197-218.

¹² Benford and Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements," p. 623.

¹³ Benford, "Framing Disputes with in the Nuclear Disarmament Movements," *Social Forces* 71 (1993), p. 691.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Frank Baumgartner, "EU Lobbying: A View from the US," *Journal of European Public Policy* 14:3 (2007), p. 486.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 486.

¹⁷ Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹⁸ William Connolly, *Christianity and Capitalism, American Style* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 44. Connolly's thoughtful discussion of the relationship between capitalism and Christianity buttresses work in other areas of political science such as Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), mapping a direct link between religious fundamentalism and social welfare security,

contention that these two events mark a distinct shift in the framing process of Christian right elites. By articulating the link and resonance between economic conservatism and social conservatism, Christian conservative elites appear to capitalize strategically on the political momentum of the tea party movement while ensuring the centrality of their own political agenda.

While issue framing is strategic in building larger constituencies, it is also fundamental to defining one's own constituency clearly. Historically, Christian right elites have deployed rhetoric reflecting particular ideological foundations in order to establish clear perceptions of "allies" and "enemies."¹⁹ Such strategies have been identified by a range of scholars. For example, Fairclough outlines a concept of "synthetic personalisation" in which narratives about "the other" explicitly or implicitly construct narratives about "us" that create "perceptions of constituency" and "perceptions of enemies."²⁰ Fairclough's own three-dimensional framework considers texts, practices (that is, discourse production, distribution, and consumption) and discursive events as socio-cultural and political practices. Our focus here arises from participant observation of two discursive events, but this work is part of larger research projects which include analysis of practices and written texts.²¹ Christian right organizations, like other social and political movements, engage in discursive practices of production, distribution, and consumption that constitute parameters of constituents, define oppositional others, and (re)generate ideological repertoires.

The events observed here also have been designed with the intention of training activists in key political positions and appropriate rhetoric. To fulfil this purpose, speakers employ a variety of frames, some of which are appropriate in settings where people share what may be referred to as a biblical perspective and some of which are appropriate for more public, secular settings. Christian right elites engage in careful instruction with activists about how to substitute a public, non-biblical discourse of democracy and rights for the sectarian discourse of the Christian conservative in-group.²² Elites may deliver instruction about the

Footnote 18 continued

as well as Kees Van Kersbergen and Philip Manow (eds), *Religion, Class Coalitions and Welfare States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), tracing the development of capitalism and the migration of Reformed Protestantism.

¹⁹ Cynthia Burack and Angelia R. Wilson, "Enemies and Allies: The Impact of US Christian Right Rhetoric on EU Politics," in Peter Scott, Christopher Baker and Elaine L. Graham (eds), *Remoralizing Britain* (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 136–154; Brian R. Calfano, Paul A. Djupe, and Angelia R. Wilson, "God Talk in the UK," *Journal of Politics & Religion*, forthcoming 2012.

²⁰ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman, 1989), p. 52; see also Brewer, "The Psychology of Prejudice." With Fairclough's work in mind, this article locates our interpretation firmly within the context of Christian right repertoires that lend meaning to language.

²¹ Burack, *Sin, Sex and Democracy*; Burack and Wilson "Enemies and Allies"; Calfano, Djupe, and Wilson "God Talk in the UK." In addition to the large plenary session speakers discussed in this article, Values Voters holds small group sessions instructing grassroots activists in campaign methods, questions to ask candidates, recruitment of congregational members, setting up "cultural impact teams," voter registration, candidate "values score cards" and policy details. These sessions are highly organized, offer a clear ideological perspective and do not allow for substantive audience participation or critical discussion.

²² Baumgartner, "EU Lobbying: A View From the US," notes the strategic use of different frames for different venues; Burack's *Sin, Sex, and Democracy*, elaborates on various frames

appropriate contexts for particular kinds of political discourse: during a Values Voter session instructing Christian conservatives on internet activism, one speaker noted the importance of deciding what medium was appropriate for what message and cautioned not to talk about homosexuality on twitter because the message “needs more nuance.”

What we, and others, have noted elsewhere is that historically these events have employed a frame that clearly delineates “us” and “other”—most often by way of wedge issues of abortion and homosexuality. However, at the two events described below, alongside these familiar repertoires, emerged a noticeably different framing process. In light of the popularity of the tea party, the framing process emphasized strategically building bridges, rearticulating, reprioritizing, and repackaging values rhetoric to feature economic themes more predominantly. The anxiety that we witnessed appeared twofold: a worry about the subordination of the Christian right’s own distinctive political agenda on social issues and a worry about the potential loss of a powerful positioning within the Republican Party.

Tea Party and Social issues

A persistent concern for Christian right elites is that economic libertarianism will eclipse and marginalize their concern with social issues such as reproductive and lesbian, gay, and transsexual rights. This concern is not unfounded. Since the Reagan administration, the relationship between Christian conservatives and the Republican Party often has been vexed by the prioritizing of an economic agenda of taxation, regulation, social welfare programs, and the like. In surveying Reagan’s legacy as president, biographer Lou Cannon notes that Reagan did not “devote much of his energies to . . . aspects of what was often called his ‘social agenda,’” and that he provided more rhetoric and “comfort” on the Christian right’s social issues than he did political capital.²³ In retrospect, what the Reagan administration began to teach the elites of the maturing Christian right was that, even if the Republican Party was more attuned than the Democratic Party to an agenda of social conservatism, Christian conservative leaders would still have to closely monitor, and occasionally threaten, the GOP to assure attention to their positions and policy preferences.²⁴ The split between Christian conservatives and the policy priorities of the Reagan administration is evident in the career of Gary Bauer, who held a domestic policy advisor position in the Reagan administration. Bauer’s positions on abortion (in favor of a constitutional amendment banning the procedure in virtually all cases), sex education (abstinence only), and AIDS (against Surgeon General C. Everett Koop’s recommendations for condom

Footnote 22 continued

and how they are communicated to Christian conservatives by movement elites. For an example of the in-group framing pedagogy in action see The National Organization for Marriage (NOM), “Talking Points,” (2011), <http://www.nationformarriage.org/site/c.comL2KeN0LzH/b.4475595/k.566A/Marriage_Talking_Points.htm>. NOM encourages its members to speak of their opposition to same-sex marriage in terms of the rights of both LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) and heterosexual Americans.

²³ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Touchstone, Simon and Schuster, 1991), pp. 812–813.

²⁴ Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power; Williams, God’s Own Party.*

distribution and use) constitute a useful comparison with Reagan's prioritization of economic conservatism.²⁵ Today Bauer continues to caution Christian conservatives, who provide the Republican Party with the votes to win elections, about the Party's propensity to support "money interests" over morality issues such as abortion and gay rights.²⁶

In public discourse, tea party groups represent the movement as ideologically simple and transparent. Tea party movement spokespersons direct public and media attention to the libertarian and constitutional-originalist positions that are consistent with the movement's preferred public identity.²⁷ For example, Dick Armey and Matt Kibbe of FreedomWorks argue in *Give Us Liberty: A Tea Party Manifesto* that, despite the diverse backgrounds of its members, the tea party movement is united in core beliefs: "constitutional principles in government," "personal responsibility," and a belief that the government is "spending too much" and is "too large and invasive."²⁸ Leaders and activists also police the public messaging of the movement at events by, for example, excluding certain forms of protest messages and imagery.²⁹

In managing this message, tea party leaders and elected officials demonstrate their interest in confirming that the movement is non-partisan in its appeal by downplaying the ideological orientations and policy aspirations of a large percentage of those who identify with the movement and support its aims. This holds particularly for racist attitudes, but it is also true of attitudes and policy prescriptions on abortion and LGBT rights and the contentious issue of church-

²⁵ Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, pp. 815–816. It is important to note that Cannon's conception of Christian conservatives is different than the one that has come to common use in the years since his book was published. Cannon argues, for example that Koop's 1986 AIDS report was "generally accepted" by the Christian right; it was not, any more than Koop's later refusal to issue a report confirming the harm to women of abortion was accepted by the Christian right. On the other hand, Cannon identifies those who rejected the 1986 report as "secular elements of the New Right," but in the years since the Reagan administration it has become clearer that Phyllis Schlafly, William Bennett, and Gary Bauer understand themselves not just as economic conservatives, but as *Christian* conservatives.

²⁶ Burack, field notes, 2006 Values Voter Summit, September 26, 2011. Speaking to a small group of activists at a ticketed "Americans United to Preserve Marriage Breakfast" at the Summit, Bauer told attendees that it is appropriate for Christian conservatives to be angry and to pressure a party that fails adequately to support socially conservative Christian candidates for public office.

²⁷ The subject of the ideological diversity of the movement arose during a panel discussion of political scientists (including Burack) and the FreedomWorks President and CEO Kibbe at George Mason University on September 15, 2010. At the event, "Remembering the Constitution: The Tea Party and the Future of American Politics," Kibbe insisted on both the "leaderless"/decentralized nature of the movement and its ideological consistency as a movement that advocates libertarian principles, constitutional fealty, and a minimal state. We disagree with both of these characterizations of the movement.

²⁸ Dick Armey and Matt Kibbe, *Give Us Liberty: A Tea Party Manifesto* (New York: William Morrow, 2010).

²⁹ Many tea party activists have denied the existence of racist elements in the movement. Writing for the *Washington Post*, David Weigel notes that after charges of racism in the tea party became common, movement activists made a concerted effort to police public events and exclude supporters bearing racist signs; see David Weigel, "Five Myths about the 'Tea Party,'" *The Washington Post*, August 8, 2010.

state separation. For example, in the summer of 2010 Tea Party Express spokesperson Mark Williams responded to a challenge from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People that tea party adherents disavow racism in the movement by questioning why the NAACP has continued to use the abbreviation for “colored people,” a term in use at the time of the organization’s founding in 1909. He followed this challenge with a blog post in the form of a letter from “Colored People” to President Lincoln that repudiated emancipation and described African Americans as lazy and dependent on public handouts.

After Williams’ epistolary satire came to light, Michael Johns of the Tea Party Federation expelled him, stating that this was an “example of the behaviour that should not, is not, and will not be tolerated within the tea party movement . . . this federation is very broadly inclusive.”³⁰ Matt Kibbe commented on the affair that “racism is repugnant and has no place in American society or our movement” but that “the NAACP’s attack on the good men and women of the tea party movement is baseless, a political attack that undermines the cause of a colorblind society. Ours is a colorblind movement based on principles not race, and has welcomed with open arms all people to our cause regardless of the color of their skin.”³¹ The anti-racist message was echoed across the movement with tea party activist Jennifer Stefano, claiming a “zero tolerance” policy on racism and adding, “I’m sorry this incident happened . . . under no circumstance should any tea party group give bigotry cover.”³²

In an attempt to steer tea party supporters away from issues that could distract attention from the movement’s preferred agenda, FreedomWorks has warned tea party supporters to stay away from social issues: “it’s going to split this movement, it’s going to distract us . . . The debt is 13 trillion dollars. Why would you focus on gay marriage when that’s the real threat to freedom—the debt?”³³ But managing a narrow message, or political agenda, is easier said than done. In September 2010, Tim Ravndal, President of the Big Sky Tea Party Association, was fired over comments he had made on Facebook two months earlier in a personal conversation about same-sex marriage. Ravndal wrote: “marriage is between a man and a woman period! By giving rights to those otherwise would be a violation of the constitution and my own rights.” The conversation continued, and when his interlocutor alluded to the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard—“fruits are decorative. Hang up where they can be seen and appreciated. Call Wyoming for display instructions”—Ravndal asked where he could acquire “that Wyoming printed instruction manual.” The Association’s board voted to fire Ravndal over the comments, and board member Roger Nummerdor said in an interview with a

³⁰ Kenneth Vogel, “Tea Party Expulsion Reveals New Rift,” *Politico*, July 20, 2010, <<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0710/39940.html>>. Before he responded to the NAACP resolution Williams had described Obama as “an Indonesian Muslim turned welfare thug” on CNN’s *Anderson Cooper 360*, September 14, 2009. After his expulsion from the Tea Party Federation he went on to lead the fight against the Lower Manhattan Mosque.

³¹ FreedomWorks, Press Release, July 14, 2010, <<http://www.freedomworks.org/press-releases/freedomworks-responds-to-naacp-allegations-of-raci>>.

³² Kate Zernike, “Tea Party Confidential,” *In These Times*, September 17, 2010, <http://inthesetimes.com/article/6439/tea_party_confidential>. Jennifer Stefano is now Director of Communications/Spokeswoman for Americans for Prosperity.

³³ Wilson, field notes, George Mason University, September 15, 2010.

reporter from the *Helena Independent Record*, “we’re hoping it doesn’t reflect on us at all because we don’t condone that type of comment. It’s just not the way we think. We try to keep ourselves on task and only do a very limited mission statement.”³⁴ Nummerdor’s allusion to his organization’s “limited mission statement” is consistent with the strategies of legitimation of the larger tea party movement.

However, according to survey evidence, racist and anti-gay sentiments are more common among tea party supporters than they are in the public at large. For example, political scientists Matt A. Barreto and Christopher Parker show that 46% of those who strongly approve of the tea party agree that “if blacks would only try harder they would be just as well off as whites” (versus 26% of all voters). Likewise, only 18% of those who strongly approve of the tea party agree that “gay and lesbian couples should have the same legal right to marry as straight couples,” and 80% oppose gay and lesbian adoption.³⁵ The key difference between these two sentiments is that neither the tea party nor the Christian right can succeed politically if racist attitudes are expressed in the public square.³⁶

While Christian right elites repudiate racism, they promote bias against LGBT people. Anti-gay rhetoric is an unambiguous feature of in-group events, although most often it appears in the guise of rights talk and democratic rhetoric in public forums.³⁷ The traditional wedge issues of abortion and homosexuality continue to play a significant rhetorical role in assuring supporters of the primacy of the social agenda and of its sanctity in political alliances. These wedge issues are critical to the construction of narratives about “us” and “other” and to the creation of “perceptions of constituency” and “perceptions of enemies.” Christian right political influence depends on the political salience of the cultural issues that form the core of Christian conservative ideology; without these cultural issues the Christian right effectively could be replaced by a secular movement such as the tea party.³⁸

Building Bridges, Sharing Histories

Before discussing the framing processes evidenced at the Faith and Freedom Conference and Strategy Briefing and the Values Voter Summit, a brief consideration of a shared historical narrative about America’s heritage will demonstrate the bridging frames between these movements—the “peg for linking together” overlapping constituencies. The homogeneous conception of the founding deployed

³⁴John Doran, “Big Sky Tea Party Cans Chief,” September 7, 2008, <http://helenair.com/news/article_e0299ac8-ba42-11df-a560-001cc4c03286.html>.

³⁵The poll, sponsored by the University Washington Institute for the Study of Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality is available at: <http://www.washingtonpoll.org/results/June_1_teparty.pdf>. See also results from Christopher Parker’s multi-state survey, <<http://depts.washington.edu/uwiser/racepolitics.html>>.

³⁶In an essay first published in *The American Prospect*, Michelle Goldberg argues that the Christian right is currently experiencing “the return of the repressed” racial anxiety that prompted a campaign of racial reconciliation in the 1990s. See Michelle Goldberg, “Tea Party Returns Christian Right to its Racist Past,” in Don Hazen and Adele M. Stan (eds), *Dangerous Brew: Exposing the Tea Party’s Agenda to Take Over America* (San Francisco, CA: AlterNet, 2010), pp. 141–143.

³⁷These distinctions between the contents of in-group and public rhetorics on same-sex sexuality and LGBT people rely on the analysis in Burack, *Sin, Sex and Democracy*.

³⁸Teun A. van Dijk, *Text and Context* (London: Longman, 1977); and Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse and Power* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

by the tea party did not spring full-blown from the imaginations of disaffected movement conservatives and ordinary citizens in the early months of the tea party movement's formation. Rather, it was already available in a variety of sources, including: the John Birch Society, WallBuilders, Newt Gingrich, Citizens United, the Claremont Institute, regular Values Voters speaker and textbook author, Bill Bennett, and the Bicentennial debates that Jill Lepore mines in her new book on the tea party, *The Whites of Their Eyes: The Tea Party's Revolution and the Battle over American History*.³⁹ The Christian right is usually identified only or primarily with contemporary social conservatism, but other key themes such as constitutional fundamentalism, enmity toward government mandates, programs, and regulation, as well as economic conservatism have been central to Christian right ideology since the 1970s.⁴⁰ Just as the issues that comprise the public agenda of the tea party movement, the Christian right anchors all these positions in the providential founding of America and in the willingness of the founders to seek the face of God.⁴¹

The formation of the tea party has offered Christian conservatives an opportunity to invest their social movement resources in an entity with a compatible ideology and the means to exert pressure on the Republican Party to achieve its goals. In terms of ideological affinity, Christian conservatives embrace the tea party as confirmation of their shared and longstanding convictions about the theological and eschatological significance of the founding and of American exceptionalism. In recent decades these convictions have been consistently articulated by Christian Reconstructionists and Christian nationalists; the most prominent representatives of this reading of the founding among scholars and students of the Christian right are Rousas John Rushdoony and his protégé, Gary North, and David Barton, founder of WallBuilders, an organization that bills itself as "presenting America's forgotten history and heroes with an emphasis on our moral, religious, and constitutional heritage."⁴² These views on the Christian

³⁹ Jill Lepore, *The Whites of Their Eyes: The Tea Party's Revolution and the Battle over American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ The Christian right's economic conservatism, including interpretations of the Bible as a primer for capitalism, owe much to the influence of Christian Reconstructionism on the Christian conservative movement as a whole. See Gary North, *An Introduction to Christian Economics*, <http://www.garynorth.com/freebooks/docs/2236_47e.htm>, which was originally published in 1973. For an analysis of other key spokespersons for Christian libertarianism see Linda Kintz, *Between Jesus and the Market: The Emotions That Matter in Right-Wing America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁴¹ For one deployment of this conception of the founding and its contemporary significance see The Presidential Prayer Team (PPT), a Christian conservative project founded in the wake of the 9/11 attacks to pray for the president and other public officials. PPT articulates the providential founding of the nation and instructs its subscribers on the founders' piety and on the historical and contemporary significance of their Christian beliefs.

⁴² *WallBuilders*, no date, <<http://www.wallbuilders.com/>>. There are various discussions in the press about whether presidential candidate Michelle Bachman follows dominionist teachings of Rushdoony or Schaeffer including: Frank Schaeffer, "Michelle Bachman Was Inspired By My Dad," <http://www.alternet.org/teaparty/151960/michele_bachmann_was_inspired_by_my_dad_and_his_christian_reconstructionist_friends_-_he_re_s_why_that_s_terrifying/?page=4>; Ryan Lizza, "Leap of Faith," <http://www.nytimes.com/reporting/2011/08/15/110815fa_fact_lizza#ixzz1VKuhFVCQ>; and John Whitehead, "Setting the Record Straight," <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-w-whitehead/michele-bachmann-christian-right_b_930834.html>.

founding of the American republic are commonplace among Christian right elites and believers. A recent example can be found in a set of films by Gingrich Productions and Citizens United: *Rediscovering God in America* (2007) and *Rediscovering God in America II: Our Heritage* (2009).⁴³ Assertions of America's Christian founding and the erosion of domestic religious liberty are central to Newt Gingrich's current political rhetoric.

In her scholarly analysis of the tea party, Lepore draws on her observations and interviews with tea party activists to examine the historical narrative of the tea party movement and to document the distance of tea party ideology from the historical record established by historians of the founding period. Lepore characterizes the basic assumptions of the tea party movement as "conflating originalism, evangelicalism, and heritage tourism [and] amount[ing] to a variety of fundamentalism."⁴⁴ Moving backward and forward in time to contrast the selected elements of the history of the founding and the tea party's version of it, Lepore argues that the movement's reading of the US Constitution, and the conception of American history that authorizes that reading, reflect tea party preoccupations better than they reflect the realities of the late eighteenth century. Or, to put this insight somewhat differently, at the center of the tea party as a political entity is a consistent set of identifications that link the founders—and the particular forms of fiscal and moral probity they are understood to exemplify—with contemporary tea party conservatism.

These compatibilities of historical imagination notwithstanding, the tea party movement still represents a challenge to the Christian right's ideological fusion of economic and social conservatism and its standing as a key constituency within the Republican Party. In 2010, at these two national meetings of Christian conservative activists, sponsored by Christian right political organizations, we observed Christian right elites responding to this challenge by accentuating and re-articulating the relationship between social and economic conservatism. Three themes emerged from the rhetoric at both events: first, the assertion that neither the tea party nor the Republican Party can succeed without the grassroots activists of the Christian right; second, the importance of articulating the inextricable link between economic conservatism and Christian values; and third, the continued use of in-group rhetoric to reassure the Christian right grassroots of the social values agenda that emphasizes wedge issues of abortion and homosexuality.

Faith and Freedom

Faith and Freedom is founder Ralph Reed's entrepreneurial effort both to return to Christian right leadership after being implicated in the Jack Abramoff scandal and to create a bridge between the Christian conservatives and the tea party.⁴⁵ Founded in June 2009, the Faith and Freedom Coalition is composed of three

⁴³ Gingrich Productions, "a performance and production company featuring the work of Newt and Callista Gingrich," <<http://www.gingrichproductions.com/>>. Citizens United also produced the infamous *Hillary: The Movie*; see *Citizens United v. FEC* S.Ct. 876 (2010).

⁴⁴ Lepore, *The Whites of Their Eyes*, p. 16.

⁴⁵ Sarah Posner, "The Non-Existent Tea Party-Religious Right God Gap," *Religion Dispatches*, September 10, 2010, <http://www.religiondispatches.org/dispatches/sarahposner/3322/the_non-existent_tea_party-religious_right_god_gap/>.

entities: Faith and Freedom Network, PAC, and Foundation. In addition to hosting its first annual conference and strategy briefing, the organization has worked to set up state affiliate organizations to carry out the work of training and mobilizing activists and lobbying public officials, and sponsored a March 2011 event attended by approximately sixteen hundred conservative activists that featured all likely 2012 Republican presidential candidates. The official principles of Faith and Freedom address conservative foreign and domestic policy, morality issues, and support for free markets and limited government:

- Respect for the sanctity and dignity of life, family, and marriage as the foundations of a free society;
- Limited government, lower taxes, and fiscal responsibility to unleash the creative energy of entrepreneurs;
- Education reform that puts children first;
- Help the poor, the needy, and those who have been left behind;
- Free markets and free minds to create opportunity for all;
- Victory in the struggle with terrorism and tyranny while supporting our democratic allies, including Israel.⁴⁶

The inaugural national meeting of the Faith and Freedom Coalition was held September 10–11, 2010 at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, DC. Although sparsely attended compared to events such as the Values Voter Summit and its forerunner, the Christian Coalition's annual Road to Victory Conference, the meeting featured an all-star lineup of current and aspiring Republican legislators, prominent conservative media personalities, Republican political consultants, and leaders of conservative organizations. As journalist Sarah Posner noted in an account from the conference, "Reed's efforts seem[ed] directed at capitalizing on panic over 'socialism' whipped up by the tea partiers."⁴⁷ In addition to rhetoric about socialism, Faith and Freedom featured constructions of the mutually dependent relationship of economic freedom and social conservatism.

The charge of socialism, central to tea party and Christian conservative agendas, was presented in one of the first speeches of the conference, by former Ohio Secretary of State and present Family Research Council senior fellow Kenneth Blackwell. Blackwell excoriated President Obama as a socialist whose destructive collectivizing impulses can be checked only by one impediment: "Mr. Obama's problem is that the Constitution of the United States stands in his way."⁴⁸ Blackwell called for people of faith to work together to "create a new American century, where liberty reigns and God is supreme."⁴⁹ Delivered in the context of

⁴⁶ Faith and Freedom Coalition, "About the Faith and Freedom Coalition," (2009–2010), <<http://www.ffcoalition.com/about/>>.

⁴⁷ Sarah Posner, "Will Ralph Reed's New Venture Wed Religious Right to Tea Partiers?," *Religion Dispatches*, March 13, 2010, <http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/2347/will_ralph_reed%E2%80%99s_new_venture_wed_religious_right_to_tea_partiers>.

⁴⁸ Claims of "socialism" are a familiar trope for collectively dismissing ideologies even marginally separate from libertarian economics and as shorthand for evil. Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power*; Williams, *God's Own Party*. Speaking on the Faith and Freedom "Winning a Generation: Getting the Youth Vote Back" panel, *Human Events* editor and youth opinion leader Jason Mattera conceded that Millennials tend to have positive attitudes toward social justice but clarified that "social justice is just a euphemism for socialism." Burack, field notes, September 10, 2010.

⁴⁹ Burack, field notes, September 10, 2010.

the rise of the tea party, a national political movement whose ideology foregrounds constitutionalism and the erosion of the liberties of US citizens, Blackwell's speech, entitled "Barack Obama's Attack on the Constitution," easily could be read as merely opportunistic. The problem with such a reading is that all of Blackwell's claims and arguments—including the anxiety that American citizens are at the mercy of an ungodly federal government and Democratic president—are at the center of Christian right political ideology. It is worth noting that although many Christian right opinion leaders have only recently foregrounded the theme of socialism in their work with Christian conservative activists and audiences, Blackwell's role for the Family Research Council during the 2008 Presidential election was to accuse Obama and the Democratic Party of representing an un-American socialism. The consistency of Blackwell's attacks on candidate—and then President—Obama indicates that the charge of socialism was not an isolated response to the tea party movement. However, the centrality of the charge, and the frequency with which it was articulated by Christian right elites at this event, offers some indication of its deployment as a framing bridge and of the value of reclaiming the tea party constituents under the Christian right political umbrella.

Other speakers at Faith and Freedom agreed with the diagnosis that the socialism of President Obama and the Democratic Party is a key factor in the oppression under which US citizens are currently living. However, the worry over socialism was not just expressed as an economic concern. Political consultant Dick Morris warned that Obama's goal was to transform the US economy from a free market to a socialist economy but this was not Obama's only goal. Obama, according to Morris, also aspires to "spread Sharia law throughout the world."⁵⁰ The perceived threat from Obama was not just economic but also religious in nature.

Founder Ralph Reed spoke on the theme of "A Return to Founding Principles" and offered a justification for his return to Christian right leadership after his role in the Jack Abramoff scandal that evoked biblical stories of the resistance of prophets and leaders to God's will. Although Reed knew he was "not the ideal person" to lead the struggle against Obama, he finally realized that God was looking for warriors who were "broken," "humble," and "contrite" to do his work. While Reed prayed about what he should do, Fox commentator Sean Hannity called Reed and urged him to act to "reclaim our country"; Reed implied that God spoke to him through Hannity to resolve his dilemma and lead him to establish Faith and Freedom. In enunciating the national problem that calls for his leadership, Reed said indirectly what others said more forthrightly: that America must "go back to a market economy." Interestingly, he concluded by noting how the Declaration of Independence establishes the right—and indeed the duty and obligation—to overthrow an oppressive government by force. Reed followed the statement about overthrowing the government with a self-deprecating smile and

⁵⁰ Morris also included Elena Kagan in the Sharia law indictment. At Faith and Freedom one well-known speaker, author and King's College President Dinesh D'Souza, directly contradicted the trope of Obama's socialism, arguing instead that Obama is driven to hate America and private enterprise because he has embraced his Kenyan father's anti-colonialism. Yet this contradiction did not call into question the overarching theme of Obama's socialism, both as an explanation for what is wrong with the country and as a mobilizing trope for left/progressive/Democratic Party evil.

the statement, “now I’m not necessarily advocating that today.” Just as Benford and Snow suggest, Reed splices together, collates, and repackages Christian right rhetoric to create a reality in which Obama represents a threat to both economic and social/moral life.

Speakers at Faith and Freedom focused on the perduring relationship between social and economic conservatism and, in particular, the ways in which economic liberty and free enterprise are dependent on a social/moral regime of respect for, and protection of, human life beginning with conception and the heterosexual nuclear family. At Faith and Family many Christian right spokespersons addressed this theme, including Ken Blackwell, Tony Perkins (President, Family Research Council), Tim Goeglein (Vice President, Focus on the Family), Bob McDonnell (Governor of Virginia), Jim Garlow (Pastor, San Diego, California), Tim Scott (now R-SC, 1st District), Dr Richard Land (President, Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Southern Baptist Convention), Star Parker (author and founder of CURE, the Center for Urban Renewal and Education), and Deal Hudson (Director, Morley Institute for Church and Culture).

For example, Tony Perkins, a former Republican member of the Louisiana House of Representatives and current President of the Christian right lobbying powerhouse Family Research Council, was adamant that “the strands of economic and social conservatism are woven together”—that “a just and good society” requires support for strong families that is pursued through opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage. Perkins noted that concentrating exclusively on economic issues to the exclusion of moral issues is a “form of idolatry.” Perkins also offered a more secular argument against abortion that is heard occasionally in activist contexts, though usually with less numerical specificity: Perkins argued that “future citizens” lost to surgical abortion and abortifacients in the US represent \$70 trillion in lost revenue and, hence, that it “does not make sense economically” to ignore the issue of abortion.

The theme of America’s fall away from God’s plan for the nation in arenas of morality, economic life, and constitutional liberty was a common theme at Faith and Freedom. Speaking on a panel about “Politics and Culture,” Ken Klulowski, Special Council and Director of the Center for Religious Liberty at the Family Research Council, cited the “unprecedented” assault on the institution of marriage and religious liberty in the contemporary US as an impetus to “the American people . . . rediscovering the constitution.” The answer to this cultural and political deterioration, according to Klukowski, is “get[ting] back to the wisdom of our . . . founding fathers.” Pastor Jim Garlow, who was involved in the successful campaign for Proposition 8 in California in 2008, concluded his plea for the nation to abandon secularism—one sign of which is “babies ripped up in the womb”—with the diagnosis that his “nation has cancer” that “has gone to stage four.” The peril is great enough that even a combination of economic and social conservatism will not suffice; as a tea party candidate and self-professed “biblical conservative,” Tim Scott espoused “revival in our land” and quoted a bible verse popular among Christian conservatives for its promise of divine political transformation. In the New International Version, which Scott quoted, Second Chronicles 7:14 reads: “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” Christian right elites speaking at this event gave a clear message that the healing

process must include not only economic solutions but Christian conservative moral solutions.

One particularly interesting speech clearly articulated the anxiety underpinning this Faith and Freedom Coalition. Southern Baptist Convention's Richard Land responded to the idea that social/moral issues should take a "back seat" to economic issues with an unambiguous "no, no, no" and a final warning to those in the tea party movement who wished to prioritize economics strategically: "you're not going to win elections without an army, and we're the army." Taking this as evidence of conservative framing disputes, Christian right elites are responding to the tea party with a clear message: if the tea party does not embrace Christian right solutions for social problems, then the substantial Christian conservative ground troops of the Republican Party will withdraw their support.

Some of the messages of speakers at Faith and Freedom offered attendees specific claims and arguments that could be deployed in the public political square because they did not depend on biblical foundations. At the same time, speakers provided biblical and faith-based foundations that were consistent with those available in other Christian conservative venues to shore up and reinscribe Christian conservative political beliefs and policy agendas. Establishing appropriate frames for different venues is one of the functions of social movement leaders. Just as the inaugural meeting of Faith and Freedom constructed a framing bridge to encourage participation in the tea party movement, socialized activists for participation in both movements, and addressed key ideological themes in the tea party, so too the Values Voter Summit reflected leaders' interests in harmonizing ideological and policy objectives.

Values Voters

The inextricable link between social and economic conservatism, and the confirmation of the importance of moral wedge issues were reiterated at the Values Voter Summit, held only one week after Faith and Freedom (September 17–19, 2010). Occasionally these were articulated by the same elites who had spoken at Faith and Freedom, but importantly these themes were voiced by the majority of speakers at Values Voters who were recognizable and trusted leaders and politicians long associated with the Christian right. They repeatedly coached the audience about the resonances between economic and social/moral messages. Michele Bachmann, a presidential candidate and regular at Values Voter, spoke to the value resonance between the tea party and the Christian right. Her speech began with an invitation not to be "scared of the tea party" because it reflects the values of the founders of our country. "Inalienable rights," she extrapolated, are "God given, not state given" and the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness concerned the right to "the fruits of our labours, not hedonism." She explained the relationship between God, the individual, and the state: "government derives power from us and God gives us power." Newt Gingrich, another presidential candidate, instructed the audience that the "key argument for economics is not money—it's freedom" and clarified the political strategy for the audience: to "make the moral case for free enterprise." And he provided attendees a brief, albeit elliptical, primer in founding ideology by way of Adam Smith: "because the origins of the *Wealth of Nations* by Smith were preceded by a theory of moral sentiments which is his great book which explains that humans

have to be moral for society to work which is what every founding father believed.”⁵¹

In addition to articulating a framing bridge between the two movements, speakers reassured the audience that this was a new package of familiar values by clearly articulating the inexorable link between national economic failure and the move away from fundamental Christian values. Mike Huckabee opened the Summit by noting that the “fiscal crisis” was a “family crisis.” Rick Santorum followed, arguing that the “size and scope of government” was directly related to the “lack of virtue” in the sense that the failure of the family structure creates the conditions for oppressive “big government.” Phyllis Schlafly, founder of the Eagle Forum and a long-time movement intellectual, noted that government funds are being misspent on policies related to families and on “subsidizing illegitimacy.” For Schlafly, government overspending is a function of government support for social dysfunction. She observed that with jobs moving overseas, men were less necessary and that the fatherless home was the cause of most social problems requiring increased welfare spending.

Peppered throughout the Summit, wedge issue activists, such as anti-abortion activist Lila Rose and Col. Bob McGuiness, senior fellow for Defense Policy at Family Research Council, hammered home the more familiar frame of “us” and “other” that has become an ideological touchstone of the Christian right. They reassured the audience of the continued need to fight against the government, which was using Obamacare and the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) to increase access to abortions and threaten the family by, for example, extending health care rights to same-sex partners of federal employees. A Values Voter training session instructed Christian right activists on how to set up a “Cultural Impact Team” in their local churches. The accompanying toolkit included professionally presented bulletin inserts educating the congregation on “Sanctity of Human Life Sunday,” “National Marriage Week USA,” and on policy issues such as the repeal of DADT and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA). The toolkit includes instructions on twenty-five Pro-Family Policy Goals for the Nation that clearly outline the problems, the solutions, and exactly how each individual can make a difference in his or her local community and nation. The text identifies talking points for Christian groups and distinctly for politicians and the media. For example, the toolkit includes a values questionnaire for individuals to present to political candidates. This, activists were told, should be presented to all Republican candidates by every Christian conservative constituent.

Importantly, just as Richard Land had asserted the centrality of the Christian right “army” to electoral victory for Republican candidates at Faith and Freedom,

⁵¹ Gingrich credited Rick Tyler at Renewing American Leadership for his comments that the key is freedom not money. Senator Jim DeMint reassured the audience that separating values from economics “doesn’t work,” that the most prosperous nation is so because it rests on a “foundation of Judeo-Christian values” and, addressing the perception of a split in conservatism, he noted “you cannot be a fiscal conservative” if you do not understand that “culture must be based on values.” “If Republicans want to build a big tent,” he explains, “we will need to integrate the value issues with our economic and political issues.” The dysfunctional society that arises from the decline of value-related issues, such as the increase of “unwed mothers,” is costing the federal government. Wilson, field notes, Values Voter Summit 2010.

former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum acknowledged the new packaging of economic issues but warned the Values Voter audience that “we can’t fly on one wing.” While he acknowledged that Christian conservatives may have to have a limited “truce” with economic conservatives on the prioritizing of cultural issues, his exhortation to Christian conservatives was direct and, at the same time, captured the frequent identification of contemporary Christian conservatives with civil-rights era African Americans: “don’t let them put you in the back of the bus.”⁵² He continued: “we can only be free if we are virtuous and we can only be virtuous if there is faith in the public square...we have to be laser-beam focused...we have to be smart...we have to step up and meet their challenge.”

In her turn at the Values Voter lectern, tea party candidate Christine O’Donnell raised the issue of compromising and winning elections. Identifying herself as one who had “toiled for years in the values movement,” she noted that she now found herself surrounded by Americans who had discovered the value of “liberty” such that “they” had now begun to join “us.” She hit at the heart of a mutual anxiety between the two movements’ elites, noting that the tea party elites’ hesitation over the social agenda was a function of the fact that “they don’t know how to deal with you.” Like other elites, she rejected the strategy of prioritizing economic over social issues, arguing that neither the tea party nor the Republican Party understands that “we would rather lose and do the right thing than win and compromise the truth.” Similarly, Phyllis Schlafly, invoking Ronald Reagan, warned that those who try to win a national campaign by sacrificing the social values portion of the conservative coalition “will lose an election.”⁵³ Taken together, these examples of the rhetoric of Christian right leaders demonstrate how changes in political contexts can motivate adjustments in internal framing that are geared to maximizing mobilization, political identity, and movement power.

Conclusion

While most tea party elites try to manage the public message away from social issues, candidates who have identified with the tea party label have deep roots in the Christian right movement. If the overlap between the Christian right and the tea party were mapped, in the intersecting middle of the Venn diagram would be legislators and state executives such as Michele Bachmann, Mike Pence, Jim DeMint, Jeff Sessions, Marco Rubio, Rand Paul, Paul Ryan, Tim Scott, Bob McDonnell, and Scott Walker. All are anti-gay, anti-abortion and dependable advocates of Christian right values. These candidates and policy-makers pursue a policy agenda that is consistent with the aims of both movements on issues such as gun control, reproductive rights, LGBT rights, property rights, taxation,

⁵² Santorum also relied heavily on the theme of American exceptionalism teaching that before the founding fathers recognized God-given natural rights “that makes the American success story possible.” Wilson, field notes, Values Voters Summit 2010.

⁵³ At the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in February 2011, much was made of Ronald Reagan’s image of the conservative movement as a “three-legged stool” of social, economic, and defense conservatives. The imagery was probably deployed so frequently because some Christian right groups, such as the Family Research Council and Concerned Women for America, had boycotted the conference to protest the inclusion of GoProud, a conservative gay organization. Burack, field notes, CPAC.

separation of church and state, unions, welfare policy, education, climate change, and the scope of federal authority. At the grassroots there is significant sharing of social and political capital as well as rhetoric. The American Family Association (AFA) has been allied and involved with the tea party movement since its inception, sharing email contact lists of constituents and selling tea party paraphernalia on its website.⁵⁴ Tea party organizers Amy Kremer (Tea Party Express) and Billie Tucker (First Coast Tea Party) appeared at the 2010 Values Voters Summit, where Tucker spoke of the importance of infusing the tea party mission with moral foundations. Indeed, Tucker testified to the Christian right crowd of God's call to her to become active in the tea party movement; awakened at 4:00 am, Tucker heard God say, "my country doesn't love me like it used to love me."⁵⁵ Perhaps it is unsurprising then that popular political leaders are those able to articulate appropriate frames in different venues, to power the "resonance machine" and, in doing so, maintain a foothold in each camp.

While some tea party movement elites want to limit the frame to liberty, constitutionalism, and economic conservatism, tea party political candidates and policy-makers frame their message to Christian conservatives to reassure these "values voters" of their commitment to social issues. Christian right elites have responded to the rise of the tea party movement and its value as a vehicle for Christian conservative politics by repackaging long-held beliefs in economic conservatism, the Christian values of the founders and founding, and the indispensability of social conservatism as a foundation for economic conservatism. It is significant that a book entitled *Indivisible: Social and Economic Foundations of American Liberty* was distributed to all attendees at the 2010 Values Voter Summit attendees.⁵⁶ Christian right elites at these events were anxious to take maximum political advantage of the rise of the tea party as well as blunt its possible effects on the Christian right's social/moral agenda.

At Values Voters, Family Research Council's Tony Perkins confirmed that the tea party movement represents a "natural alliance of those who are deeply concerned about our country."⁵⁷ However, the rhetoric articulated at these two key events indicates that the Christian right conceptualizes concerns about the economy through the lens of the decline of American morality and that the Christian right will expect loyalty from tea party policy-makers regarding social issues. Observing these discursive events through the critical lens of the framing process, it becomes clear that alliances are not natural as Perkins suggests. Instead the framing processes evidenced here articulate an anxiety on behalf of the Christian right elite that necessitates a "spliced together," "collated and

⁵⁴ For the American Family Association's tea party-related items, see AFA Online (2009), <<http://store.afa.net/c-94-tea-party-tea-shirts-buttons-sticker-specials.aspx>>.

⁵⁵ Wilson, field notes, Values Voters Summit, September 17, 2010.

⁵⁶ Heritage Foundation, *Indivisible: Social and Economic Foundations of American Liberty* (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, 2010). The book collects essays by social and economic conservatives "focus[ing] on a key thread of each other's argument, looking at it through their own lens and describing what they particularly value about it from their perspective. Together, these principles make up the fabric of American liberty and the two lenses help us see the whole more vividly" (from the Preface by Jennifer A. Marshall and J.D. Foster). The book is available free as a download from the Heritage Foundation, <<http://ac21doj.org/TOC-GandP/Indivisible.PDF>>.

⁵⁷ Wilson, field notes, Values Voters, September 17, 2010.

packaged” “new angle of vision” in order to build a framing bridge, to reinvigorate constituencies, and to “maximize mobilization” while ensuring continued political power. To use a more Christian right-friendly metaphor, they are pouring old wine into new wineskins.