

Closing Remarks

“Fractures, Alliances, and Mobilizations in the Age of Obama: Emerging Analyses of the “Tea Party Movement”

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Hello, my name is Christine Trost. I am the Program Director for the Center for the Comparative Study of Right-Wing Movements and also an Assistant Director for the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues, where the Center is housed. I am also one of the conference organizers.

When we began to plan this conference last February, the Tea Party was receiving a lot of media attention and there was a great deal of speculation about the impact that this movement and Tea Party candidates would have on American politics, but there was very little scholarship on it.

Indeed, at the time, some commentators were dismissing the Tea Party as an elite-driven, media construction that would fade away as swiftly as it appeared. And to be honest we weren't absolutely certain the Tea Party would still be active by the time the fall elections came around. We certainly didn't predict that there would be hundreds of Tea Party candidates running for House and Senate seats in the general election, with many of them on the Republican ticket.

We did sense, however, that the mobilizations that were happening around the country, which involved significant numbers of people who identified with the Tea Party, marked an important moment in American politics and a new development in politics on the Right in this country, and thus was worthy of study.

The subtitle of this conference is “Emerging Analyses of the Tea Party Movement” and I want to thank the scholars who spoke today for going out on a limb and sharing with us their preliminary analyses before all of the data is in. It is still early, the November election is still around the corner, but I think we have established today that those who make up the Tea Party are not to be dismissed. I think this conference has also succeeded in shedding new light on the Tea Party, its origins, constituencies, and likely impacts on American politics now and in the future, and in this way the conference and the scholarship presented today have begun to fill an important gap.

Additionally, I hope that this conference has demonstrated the importance of approaching scholarship on the Right in an interdisciplinary way, which is a key goal of our Center. That is, to understand new ruptures and movements in American politics, all politics, we require not only the expertise of Political Scientists who study political parties, elections and public opinion, but also the historical contextualizations and the theoretical and substantive insights of political theorists, sociologists, historians, race and gender scholars, and journalists.

Hopefully by initiating this interdisciplinary dialog and by including the questions and insights of our audience in this conversation, our understanding of the political phenomenon known as the Tea Party has been deepened, enriched, and we have moved the conversation forward, in addition to pointing to new areas of research and raising new questions to work on in the coming months and years.

In addition to scholarly lessons, I think the speakers at conference have also pointed to some interesting political lessons – both for those on the right and for those on the left.

The research presented today suggests that Tea Party supporters are part of a very active and very conservative wing of the Republican Party. And to the extent that Tea Party candidates and activists are able to frame their message and their issues in ways that appeal to a larger and more moderate segment of the American public, they are likely to wield significant influence within the Republican party and move it further to the right.

There also seems to be a lesson for the left. To the extent that Tea Party activists and candidates succeed in mobilizing a significant segment of the American public and start winning elections, those on the left will need to take seriously the challenge that Tea Party activists pose to progressive politics and figure out how best to respond. So perhaps the Tea Party will not only mobilize the right in this country, but also the left.

After the November election, the scholars who presented their research today will revise their papers in light of new data that is gathered, and we plan to publish these papers in the form of an edited volume. If you registered for this conference, we will send you an email announcing the publication of the book. Also, in about a week we will post a link on the Center's website to video taken of this conference, which we encourage you to share with anyone who was not able to come today.

This conference is the product of a collaboration and there are many people that Larry Rosenthal and I would like to thank:

First we would like to thank our Co-sponsors, who provided financial support and helped us get the word out about the conference. These include:

- the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues
- the Institute of Governmental Studies
- the Charles and Louise Travers Department of Political Science
- the Department of Sociology
- the Department of Gender and Women's Studies
- the Haas Diversity Research Center
- the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities,
- the Center for Race and Gender
- the Center for the Study of Social Change
- the American Cultures Center,
- and the Berkeley Undergraduate Political Science Association.

Kathleen MacClay from Media Relations was also instrumental in helping us get the word out about the conference and reach members of the press who will hopefully write about this conference, so that millions more people will have access to the insights that were shared today, and we thank her for her help with this.

We would like to thank the members of our conference planning committee, Professors Paola Bacchetta, Carole Joffe, Russ Ellis, and Michael Omi, and our wonderful Graduate Student Researcher Rebecca Alexander, who in addition to helping conceptualize the conference and identify speakers provided invaluable logistical support to ensure that things ran smoothly today.

We would also like to thank the staff at the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues, where our Center is housed, for their assistance with the many logistics and details required to pull off this event, especially Elizabeth Carlen and Eva Seto, and our volunteers: Samantha Fitzgerald, Cecilia Lucas, and Caleb Westberg

We would like to thank Tia Stoller, who donated her time and talent along with staff resources to the design of the conference poster and program.

We especially wish to thank our Speakers and panel chairs who shared with us their original research and insights and gave us much food for thought today.

Lastly, we would like to thank you, our Audience, for your interest and many thoughtful questions throughout the day.

Our Center is dedicated to nurturing new scholarship on the Right in the US, as well as other parts of the world. In addition to planning conferences and colloquia that feature an interdisciplinary mix of scholars who study right-wing ideology, politics and organizational forms and their likely directions in the 21st century, the Center promotes research; offers mini-grants, fellowships and training opportunities to Berkeley students; and publishes

findings. We hope you will continue to follow the work of our Center and we look forward to seeing you at more of our Center events.