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**Howard Jarvis, Populist Entrepreneur:
Reevaluating the Causes of Proposition 13**

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In the months preceding the June 6, 1978 election, Proposition 13, California's fractious property tax ballot measure, received almost daily media attention. Newspaper columnists from California and across the country swapped partisan barbs, debating *ad infinitum* the merits and faults of the initiative. Political and economic pundits calculated and re-calculated the measure's possible effects and unintended consequences. Heated letters to the editor and sharp-edged political cartoons saturated the editorial pages of local newspapers. Opinion polls registered the public's sentiment toward the measure weekly. Shrill advertisements touting either the necessity or the destructiveness of the proposition interrupted regularly scheduled television and radio programs. Indefatigable Howard Jarvis, the monomaniacal, septuagenarian leader of the tax limitation movement, was seemingly everywhere. By election day, the proponents and the opponents of Prop. 13 had spent over two million dollars each on the measure.

Despite, or perhaps due to the immense media attention given to Prop. 13, 69 percent of eligible California voters flocked to the polls on primary day to cast their vote on the controversial property tax limitation measure. The vote in favor of the 389-word ballot initiative was overwhelming. Californians supported Prop. 13 by a two-to-one margin. Sixty-five percent of those who turned out cast their vote for the measure. Commonly referred to as "Jarvis-Gann" for the amendment's co-authors, Howard Jarvis and Paul Gann, the initiative carried nearly every demographic group. Not surprisingly, homeowners supported Prop. 13 more than renters. Republicans were more apt to support Jarvis-Gann than Democrats. Support for Prop. 13 was greater among people with upper bracket incomes, but declined among people with higher levels of education. Men and the elderly were generally more supportive of the measure, public employees widely opposed the measure, and whites were over three times as likely as blacks to vote for the property tax cut (Sears and Citrin 1982, 96-126; Citrin and Levy 1981, 8-9; Smith and Citrin, 1979, 3-6).

After the passage of Jarvis-Gann, local government officials were forced to act swiftly. The measure was to take effect on July 1, only three weeks after it was passed by the voters. Prop. 13 required local governments to limit any *ad valorem* tax on real property to one percent of assessed valuation while scaling back assessed values of properties to 1975-76 levels, restrict increases in assessment to two percent a year except upon sale of the property, and prohibit any new state or local taxes without two-thirds voter approval. With their vote, Californians slashed property tax revenue in fiscal year 1978-1979 by an estimated 57 percent. The annual revenue of local governments (cities, counties, schools, special districts) was reduced by roughly \$6 billion. Jarvis-Gann was a decisive property tax cut.

Since election day, dozens of articles and numerous books have examined both the causes and effects of the renowned property tax measure. The overarching significance of Jarvis-Gann, though, far outstrips the immediate fiscal impact it had on the financial condition of the citizens as well as the state and local governments of California. Its symbolic import has grown to be much larger than its original fiscal purpose of reducing property taxes. For many observers, the passage of Prop. 13 in 1978 not only ignited a tax revolt in this country; it also ushered in a rising tide of conservative populist rhetoric which inundated the national conscience. "The collective impulse of Jarvis-Gann was populist," according to two scholars, "in that it was hostile to established institutions and complex

legislative answers to rising taxes" (Sears and Citrin 1982, 16). The conventional wisdom that Prop. 13 was the populist uprising that inspired a conservative crusade for lower taxes and smaller government across the country endures today.

This paper aims to challenge the conventional wisdom accompanying Prop. 13 by reassessing the purported causes of the ballot measure. Focusing on the financial and organizational aspects of the campaign for the property tax cutting measure, I reexamine the procedural aspects of the ballot initiative. To this end, I offer an alternative conceptual framework -- *faux* populism -- which enables us to reconceptualize the important, but frequently neglected role of Howard Jarvis, the principal architect of Proposition 13, and his financial and organizational support. In the following section, I introduce the conceptual framework of *faux* populism and the concepts "populist entrepreneur" and "public mood." Then in the second section, I consider the journalistic accounts of the broader implications of Jarvis-Gann. In the third section I summarize and evaluate the scholarly literature on Prop. 13, focusing on the two widely cited factors that contributed to the passage of the tax-limitation measure: 1) a fervent tax limitation public mood (excited by rising property taxes and an unresponsive government); and 2) the active presence of grassroots community organizations. I suggest that the first of these two causal factors was a necessary cause of the passage of Proposition 13, and that the second factor was not.

In the final section of the paper, I argue that scholars have tended to neglect a necessary factor in the success of Proposition 13 -- the role of the populist entrepreneur. To supplement and amend the historical record, I use the *faux* populism framework to look critically at the pivotal role played by one of the principal architects of Prop. 13, Howard Jarvis, and his two organizations, the Organizations of United Taxpayers and the Los Angeles Association of Apartment Owners.¹ By introducing new evidence regarding the campaign for Prop. 13 and the role played by Jarvis and his organizations, I bring into question much of the conventional wisdom surrounding Prop. 13. I conclude by arguing that Proposition 13, while hugely successful at the polls, was far less grassroots and populist than is generally believed, especially when we consider the financial resources and the strategies and techniques used by Jarvis and his organizations to inspire popular support for the tax limitation initiative.²

¹Research for this historical section draws on material collected from the Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, the Howard Jarvis Collected Papers and the Paul Gann Collected Papers, both held at the California State Library, Sacramento, the California State Archives, Sacramento, and the Office of the Secretary of State, Sacramento.

²This paper is part of a larger project on late twentieth-century "populist" tax limitation movements in three American states and the role of the populist entrepreneurs who mobilize popular support for their measures. The other two case studies are Barbara Anderson and Proposition 2 1/2 in Massachusetts in 1980, and Douglas Bruce and Amendment 1 in

Faux Populism: A Conceptual Framework

In an effort to achieve a fuller understanding of the passage of the controversial tax measure, this paper offers an alternative perspective in the examination of the causes of Prop. 13. Using the ballot initiative to advance his tax limitation goals, Howard Jarvis forged a broad-based, albeit temporary, popular coalition of angry taxpayers. In 1978, Jarvis successfully transmuted the widespread, but amorphous anti-tax and government limitation public mood in California into his particular cause of slashing local property taxes. In examining this transformative process, I argue that Jarvis' role as "populist entrepreneur" is crucial to explaining how an ambiguous popular sentiment can become transposed into a particular political "movement" via the initiative process.

As the case study will reveal, Howard Jarvis and his campaign for Proposition 13 shared some, but also lacked many of the qualities of traditional populist movements. In his classic examination of the "democratic movement-building" of populist causes, Lawrence Goodwyn argues that there are four sequential stages in the building of any democratic, populist movement: the movement forming, the movement recruiting, the movement educating, and the movement politicized (Goodwyn 1978; xviii-xxi). This arduous, but democratic process is necessarily of, by, and for the people. Populist movements, in the traditional sense, necessarily ascend from the grassroots, as they are bottom-up, educative forms of protest demanding the active participation of the masses.

Rather than understanding Prop. 13 as a populist movement, I suggest it can be better understood as a *faux* populist moment. *Faux* populism -- defined here as a populist-sounding message without the educative or political mobilization of the people -- substitutes the ballot initiative for the deliberative process of democratic movement-building. Rhetorically, *faux* populism approximates some of the facets of traditional populist movements. Procedurally, though, *faux* populist moments lack the mobilization and active participation of the citizenry. Using the process of direct democracy, populist entrepreneurs, such as Howard Jarvis, instead are able to offer citizens populist-sounding solutions as antidotes to societal problems. If the populist entrepreneur's solution resonates, citizens can become passive supporters of the measure. In terms of mass mobilization, citizens merely need to turn out to vote for the measure on election day.

For *faux* populist ballot initiatives to be successful, two necessary conditions must be present. First, an unequivocal, though usually amorphous, public mood must resonate among the populace. The public mood -- understood collectively as popularly held sentiments -- constitutes "the notion that a rather large number of people out in the country are thinking along certain common lines" (Kingdon 1984, 153). The public mood is real, but is poorly articulated; it is fragmented and ill-defined. Second, a populist entrepreneur who has sufficient organizational and financial resources to capitalize on the amorphous popular sentiment, must be able to channel and fashion the public mood into a coherent message.

Like Kingdon's policy entrepreneur and Eder's moral entrepreneur, the populist entrepreneur, seizing an opportunity, taps into an ill-defined public mood and couples his or her own pet solution to it (Kingdon 1984, 190-192; Eder 1993, 149). The role of the populist entrepreneur, then, is to craft a popular message, place it on the ballot via the initiative process, and push it as the solution to the widely perceived public problem.³ When the populist entrepreneur successfully taps the public mood, it is quite possible that a *faux* populist moment will occur (Smith 1996).

Without a doubt, Jarvis grasped and articulated for many Californians their concerns regarding higher property taxes and unresponsive governments. Whether the tax revolt should be understood as a populist movement in the traditional sense, though, is questionable. Notwithstanding his efforts following the passage of Prop. 13, Jarvis did not create a long-lasting political movement. Rather, Jarvis appealed to the base prejudices of the populace and successfully abbreviated the steps found in classic populist movements. Compressing the four-step process of "democratic movement-building," Jarvis directly tapped into the popular sentiment and attached his ready-made political solution to the ambiguous popular mood. Using the ballot initiative, Jarvis did not have to recruit, educate, or politicize citizens about the tax issue; he only needed them to come out to vote on June 6th. While there were certainly numerous homeowners and tax limitation community organizations in California that contributed to the success of the tax revolt, these local groups were not necessary conditions for Jarvis' initiative to be successful.

While this paper offers only a single case study of how populist entrepreneurs are able to mold an ambiguous public mood into a tangible, populist-sounding message, it should provide ample information to begin identifying and isolating these two key ingredients in *faux* populism. In generalizing from the case study, the concept of *faux* populism should help scholars better understand and explain the dynamics of contemporary populist initiative moments and how leaders of such moments are able to manufacture mass appeal in support of their endeavors. Comprehending how a popular mass sentiment, indefinite and ill-defined, can be tapped by a populist entrepreneur is the first step in understanding this contemporary derivation of populism.

³The populist moment is akin to Kingdon's understanding of when public policies are adopted. For Kingdon, public policies become adopted when the "separate streams of problems, policies, and politics come together at certain critical times." A "policy window" opens -- which allows for the adoption of a policy -- when there are momentous developments in either the problem or political streams. When the two agenda setting streams (the political and problem) become coupled with the independently flowing, alternative generating policy stream, policy can be decided upon and adopted. During this fleeting time of stream convergence, policy entrepreneurs, in the form of individuals or groups, are able to match their pet solutions to the pertinent problems, which in turn facilitates the decision making of important political actors (Kingdon 1984, 21; 173).

The Conventional Wisdom: The Revolt of the Haves

For their part, journalists have celebrated the populist and conservative aspects of the tax limitation movement in California. In their numerous essays and books, journalists generally have lauded Prop. 13 as a grassroots, middle-class, popular revolt led by ordinary, small property-owning Californians. The monumental success of Jarvis-Gann, many of these authors maintain, helped to pave the way for a seasoned proponent of tax cuts and former two-term governor of California to capture the White House in 1980. Elevating Prop. 13 to near mythic stature, these journalistic accounts have advanced the conventional wisdom that continues to envelop the tax cutting measure.

Liberal journalist Robert Kuttner offered one of the first extended investigations into the causes and consequences of the tax revolt in California. As the title of his notable book proclaimed, Kuttner viewed Proposition 13 as a Revolt of the Haves. The tax limitation movement in California was, according to Kuttner, "that rarest of political events, an authentic mass protest brought on by economic grievances" (Kuttner 1980, 19). According to Kuttner, Jarvis-Gann was inspired and championed by a populist cadre of middle-class taxpayers from across the state who "adopted a what-the-hell attitude" (Ibid., 79). Although "Jarvis' legions were well fed, well off, mostly middle-class rebels," the California tax revolt, according to Kuttner, "recalled the mass movements of the Depression years" (Ibid., 17). Even renters loved Jarvis, as he had "assumed the populist mantle, while the state's liberal establishment came to personify the hated status quo" (Ibid., 77). Fed up with regressive property taxes and rising inflation, Californians of all walks of life attacked the problem head-on. While personally finding "the spectacle" of Howard Jarvis and Paul Gann "rallying the masses" somewhat "distressing," Kuttner nevertheless regarded Prop. 13 as a genuine populist movement (Ibid., 27-28).

Following Kuttner, a panoply of other distinguished journalists added to the conventional wisdom surrounding Prop. 13. With little hesitation, liberal and conservative journalists alike routinely anointed Proposition 13 as a cornerstone in the conservative movement. Taking a page out of Howard Jarvis' own handbook of pithy quotes, erstwhile Wall Street Journal editorialist James Ring Adams expressed in his book, Secrets of the Tax Revolt, "The vote for Proposition 13 was to the Tax Revolt what Bastille Day was to the French Revolution" (Adams 1984, 166). Largely concurring with Kuttner, Adams observed that the successful California uprising sparked a flame that quickly spread to other states. According to Adams, "excited taxpayers had risen in revolt against their established elites" (Ibid., 3). Jarvis-Gann served as a model for subsequent middle-class uprisings in other states. Couching his argument in supply-side theory, Adams claimed that the supporters of Prop. 13 "cut across every special constituency in the state except for government workers," as "the excitement of Proposition 13 did not result simply from a mercenary calculation of costs and benefits" (Ibid., 175-176). For Adams, "the deeper phenomenon may be that the voters discovered that they were right and their leaders were wrong. . . .The public had an innate sense that the tax burden had damaged the economy" (Ibid., 175). With Jarvis-Gann, the people had spoken: "voters discovered that they were right and their leaders were wrong" (Ibid., 175).

According to a veteran journalist from the Washington Post, Thomas Edsall, the success of Prop. 13 was a pivotal event which was readily capitalized on by the Republican party. In his important book, Chain Reaction, Edsall writes how the measure "split the electorate along lines that reinforced and widened the divisions that had already begun to appear over race" (Edsall 1991, 130). Edsall argues provocatively (Ibid., 131):

The tax revolt was a major turning point in American politics. It provided new muscle and new logic to the formation of a conservative coalition opposed to the liberal welfare state. The division of the electorate along lines of taxpayers versus tax recipients dovetailed with racial divisions. . . The tax revolt provided conservatism with a powerful internal coherence, shaping an anti-government ethic, and firmly establishing new grounds for the disaffection of white working- and middle-class voters from their traditional Democratic roots.

In short, according to Edsall, the tax revolt in California helped to drive a wedge between the Democratic party and its traditional base of working- and middle-class supporters.

Numerous other journalists have offered a variety of interpretations for the passage of Prop. 13. Liberal journalist Anthony Lewis, a columnist for the New York Times, wrote, "The citizenry thumbed its nose at government because of burdensome taxes, and Howard Jarvis and his Proposition 13 epistle were prophetic" (Lewis 1978). Tom Wicker, also a columnist for the New York Times, commented that Prop. 13 symbolized a "new revolution" in American politics, representing "a massive rejection of liberal government as it had developed in the post-New Deal era" (Wicker 1978). Writing in the Saturday Review, Carl Tucker charged that Jarvis-Gann was a vote for "control over government's purse strings" (Tucker 1978). Neo-conservative Irving Kristol opined that the property tax cut exemplified the victory of "economic growth in a free society" over "the allocation of income and wealth by government in a stagnant economy" (Kristol 1978). Concurring, Charles Crawford alleged that, "What happened is not so much a tax revolt as an anti-government big spending revolt" (Crawford 1978). Journalist Joseph Kraft, on the other hand, emphasized the populist underpinnings of Prop. 13, arguing in the Los Angeles Times that the measure was an expression of middle class hedonism (Kraft 1978).

The hegemony of these journalistic accounts has perpetuated the conventional wisdom that the California "tax revolt" was a conservative populist uprising which mobilized millions of Californians. Over the years, Prop. 13 has come to symbolize much more than a simple ballot question reducing property taxes. As William Baroody, publisher of Public Opinion noted:

A referendum by its very nature is like a public opinion poll: the public is asked to say -- yes or no, up or down -- whether it supports a single idea. . . . Since the voters were answering only a single question, however, their response lends itself to many different interpretations.

In the case of Prop. 13, though, a general consensus among journalists exists concerning the larger meaning of Prop. 13. The conventional wisdom suggests that Prop. 13 was a populist uprising spawned by the people. The underlying assumption of most of the journalistic accounts is that Prop. 13 was propelled by middle-class property owners. Upon closer

scrutiny, though, the specific underlying causes of this "populist revolt" are much less clear. Far less sensationalist than these journalistic narratives, scholars too have explored the different causal aspects of the tax revolt. The following section examines these scholarly explanations for the causes of Proposition 13.

The Causes of Proposition 13: Scholarly Accounts

Academic research probing the causes of Proposition 13 has tended to reinforce the conventional wisdom advanced by journalists -- that the passage of Proposition 13 was a sweeping populist uprising. Scholars have arrived at this conclusion because they have concentrated exclusively on two causal factors of Prop. 13. First, scholars have focused on the palpable public mood in California. Millions of Californians decried their rising property taxes and their idle state and local governments. Second, scholars have identified the presence of community-based, grassroots organizations which presumably sustained the initiative campaign. In contrast, scholars have neglected the actual process of the campaign for Prop. 13, including the crucial role played by Howard Jarvis, the chief architect of Prop. 13, and his support organizations. The research by scholars on the public mood and community-based grassroots organizations which preceded the June election is now assessed.

The Public Mood

Analyzing data collected from public opinion polls prior to the June 6, 1978 election, several scholars have shown that citizens were concerned with two issues: 1) rising property taxes and 2) frustration with the inadequate response by government officials in dealing with escalating property taxes. This volatile public mood among Californians, these scholars maintain, precipitated the passage of Prop. 13.

Excessive Property Taxes

The first aspect of the public mood which purportedly triggered the widespread support for Prop. 13 was that a majority of Californians believed that their property taxes were becoming prohibitively high (Musgrave 1979; Levin 1979; Smith and Citrin 1979; Rabushka and Ryan 1982; Citrin and Levy 1981; O'Sullivan, Sexton, and Sheffrin 1995). The dramatic increase in tax assessments as well as the collective clamor for lower property taxes by California's property owners are well documented. Scholars have shown that the rational, economic self-interest of property owners led many to strongly support the tax limitation measure. Anticipating considerable tax savings, voters calculated their anticipated tax savings with the passage of Prop. 13 and acted accordingly.

The predicament of excessively high property taxes was not a new occurrence for most Californians. The groundswell of support for Proposition 13 was a long time in the making. Beginning in the mid-1960s, homeowners were becoming increasingly disgruntled, if not outraged, with their escalating property taxes (Levin 1979). In 1966, the state legislature tried to reform an admittedly inequitable property tax system by passing a law requiring all property to be reassessed systematically so as to conform to current market levels. The bill, AB 80, charged county tax assessors with setting property values uniformly at 25 percent of the market value by the 1971-72 fiscal year (Levy and Zamolo 1978). In

the 1970s, though, a listless economy combined with rampant inflation eroded people's real incomes, simultaneously causing property values to rise. Because local governments did not reduce their property tax rates to offset the increase in homeowner assessments, property taxes too escalated at dizzying rates (Levy and Zamolo 1978, 5). According to Jack Citrin and Frank Levy, "Inflation fed the public resentment that culminated in the passage of Proposition 13" (Citrin and Levy 1981, 24).

Comparatively, property taxes and other taxes in California were indeed higher than in other states. Just prior to the passage of Prop. 13 in 1978, average "property taxes in California were 51 percent above the national average" (Citrin 1984, 9). In the 1970s, the overall tax burden falling on Californians was also well above the national average (Oakland 1981, 34-36). In fiscal year 1975-76, California state and local governments took in close to \$21 billion in taxes, with a per capita tax rate of \$965. That year, property taxes alone accounted for approximately 41 percent of the total tax revenue for state and local governments, which was five percent higher than the average for the rest of the states (Ibid., 36). With local governments required to reassess property every three years, economist William Oakland writes that homeowners were facing "property tax bills that were doubling or tripling without a corresponding increase in their income flow" (Ibid., 40).

Echoing Kuttner's analysis that Jarvis and Gann's ballot initiative was the beginning of the revolt of the haves, scholars have probed extensively the socio-economic base of support for Jarvis-Gann using survey data. While Prop. 13 is generally viewed as a broad-based tax revolt among the masses who were bent on reining in excessive property taxes, some groups of people were more animated about their rising property taxes than others. In particular, "homeowners at all levels of income were more likely than renters to see themselves as benefiting from the property tax cut promised by Proposition 13" (Citrin and Levy 1981, 11). Also not surprisingly, the "support for Proposition 13 increased with the size of one's anticipated tax reduction" (Citrin and Levy 1981, 11).

Using survey data from 1978, David Sears and Jack Citrin found even more generally, "the more convinced the voter was that he was paying too much in taxes, the more likely he was to support" Jarvis-Gann (Sears and Citrin 1982, 5). In particular, residents living in Southern California who were "[m]iddle-aged, white, fully employed, affluent male homeowners were the greatest enthusiasts for it" (Ibid., 110, 140). However, the survey data also indicated that not everyone supported Prop. 13, even though it might have been the rational, self-interested course of action. Many people, especially those who were the "most economically vulnerable" -- "elderly homeowners" and "those on low incomes feeling most squeezed by inflation" -- demonstrated little support for the tax revolt (Ibid., 140). Overall, though, the forthright "preference for reduced taxes, especially among the affluent," was the major economic driving force behind the success of Proposition 13 (Ibid., 162).

Although for different reasons, the rational expectations of voters grounds William Fischel's interesting analysis into the underlying base of support for Jarvis-Gann. Fischel argues that the popular support for Prop. 13 stemmed from the loss of local control over

schooling after the California Supreme Court's *Serrano* decision in 1972. In that decision, the Court ruled that the use of local property taxes to finance public schools violated the equal protection of children guaranteed by the state constitution. As a result of the decision, the funding of public education was detached from revenue generated by local property taxes. Fischel reasons that residents, following the *Serrano* ruling, were desired to have their property taxes cut since the financing of their children's public education was no longer directly tied to their rate of taxation (Fischel 1989). While this may have been an impetus for the support of Prop 13, public opinion polls failed to capture this line of logic.

Questions, though, continue to linger with respect to the supposed rational, self-interested motivation of those who supported the tax cutting initiative. In an interesting, but rarely cited study drawing on data from California's 58 counties, Richard Brody found "no consistent relationship to a county's level of support for" Prop. 13, except for the percentage of owner-occupied homes in the county (Brody 1979, 27-28). While Jarvis-Gann failed to muster a majority of votes in only three of the 58 counties, Brody found no clear relationship between a county's support for the measure and its population, regional location, public school population, or residents' ability to pay taxes. In fact, Brody discovered some highly counter-intuitive results. Most notably, Brody found "growth of per-capita county taxes between 1970 and 1977" to be "*negatively* related to support for Proposition 13," as well as "counties with higher tax rates tended to be less enthusiastic about 13 than those with lower rates" (Ibid., 27). With respect to county-level support of Prop. 13, Brody's unequivocal conclusion was, "it is not clear what voters were voting for or against when they supported it" (Ibid., 28).

Unresponsive Government

The second aspect of the public mood which led to the support of Proposition 13 was that a majority of Californians were infuriated by the slow response of their state and local governments in dealing with the property tax crisis. According to several scholars, Prop. 13 sounded the alarm of the average California homeowner's anger towards not only excessive property taxes, but also unresponsive government. Following the election, political pollster Mervin Field wrote, "There were clear signs that the public wanted to see large-scale cutbacks in government services, some well-paid bureaucrats out of jobs, and visible demonstrations that waste was being eliminated from government spending" (Field 1978, 7). Fed up with public officials who were perceived to be inattentive and inefficient, the vote for Prop. 13 was a way for citizens to send a direct message to the state legislature and to Governor Jerry Brown. "Proposition 13 was not the first successful action in the grassroots uprising," Jack Citrin writes, "but as the most dramatic and best publicized it came to symbolize the public's disgruntlement and its desire for cheaper and humbler government" (Citrin 1984, 3).

This public mood among Californians did not appear overnight. During the 1970s, a growing number of Californians came to view their state and local governments as increasingly wasteful and unresponsive. With property taxes on the rise, local governments were able to steadily boost their coffers. Concurrently, state revenues were also soaring. In

1978, the state was sitting atop an estimated budget surplus of \$5.7 billion. By some accounts, the surplus would have eclipsed \$10 billion if Prop. 13 had not passed (O'Sullivan, Sexton, and Sheffrin 1995, 3). Rather than providing some property tax relief, though, state officials in Sacramento were squirreling away the surplus funds for a rainy day. But in the interim, many taxpayers felt they were getting soaked.

For many Californians, the unproductive 1977 legislative session proved to be the last straw. Several property tax bills were introduced into the legislature during the year, but that fall, "the legislature adjourned in well publicized disarray, unable to agree on any new property tax relief" (Levy and Zamolo, 1978, 2). As Eric Smith and Jack Citrin note, Jarvis-Gann gained tremendous support because of "the inability of state government to provide meaningful tax relief despite the existence of a huge surplus in its treasury" (Smith and Citrin, 1979, 2). After years of listening to the prattle coming out of Sacramento, the people decided to lower their property taxes themselves.

Polling data from 1978 clearly displayed that a majority of citizens thought their state and local governments were inefficient as well as unresponsive to the escalating property tax problem. In the months preceding the June election, California political pollster, Mervin Field, tracked public opinion pertaining to the role of government and the level of property taxes. One of the foremost independent political pollsters and public opinion analysts in California, Field found that in May, 1978, a substantial majority of the public was sympathetic to three of the principal arguments put forth by the proponents of Prop. 13. Specifically, over 70 percent of the public agreed (Field, 1978, 5):

- * Property taxes are so high many homeowners can't afford to live in their own homes.

- * Local governments can get by on a lot less money.

- * Proposition 13 is the only way to send a strong message to government that people are fed up with high taxes and too much government spending.

In contrast, only one of the arguments advanced by the opponents of Jarvis-Gann, according to Field's polling, resonated strongly with the public. Over 60 percent of those polled agreed with the statement, "property taxes cut by Proposition 13 would have to be replaced by other taxes" (Ibid.).

The extent to which Californians were striking out against their public institutions when they voted for the measure remains somewhat ambiguous. The vote for Prop. 13, as shown by the journalistic accounts, was broadly interpreted. As William Baroody perceptively warned shortly after the election (Baroody 1978, 2):

It is especially easy for commentators with an ideological bias to come to radically different conclusions: those on the left can persuasively argue that Californians were only seeking a cut-back in government waste, while those on the right can say with equal force that the public wants to roll back parts of the Great Society.

While public opinion polls measured sizable animosity towards "government costs, waste and inefficiency," Californians did not express a particularly strong desire to downsize

government or public services (Field 1978, 5). In fact, one survey revealed voters actually favoring an increase in expenditures on governmental services (Citrin 1979).

A close examination of Field's survey research cautions against a broad interpretation of the anti-government sentiment of Californians in their support of Prop. 13. Public opinion polls carried out just prior to the June election demonstrated that the vote for Prop. 13 was not cast against government in general. According to Field, "While there were numerous expressions of 'let's get rid of government' at Proposition 13 rallies, the majority of voters do not appear to have been indicating such a revolutionary desire" (Field 1978, 6). Rather than calling for the abolition or downsizing of government, Californians wanted their state and local government officials to be more responsive to their concerns over the mounting taxes on their property.

Grassroots Community Organizations

The second major causal explanation for the passage of Proposition 13 advanced by scholars underscores the initiative's grassroots underpinnings. Two scholars in particular have focused on the myriad of local homeowners associations and taxpayers organizations existing in California prior to 1978. Approaching the topic with different research methodologies, these two scholars in particular have tried to assess the role activists and their organizations played in the mobilization of popular support for the property tax slashing initiative. While acknowledging the catalytic importance of higher tax assessments and the growing bitterness towards government among many Californians, Clarence Lo and Jack Citrin both argue that Jarvis-Gann ultimately passed due to the surge of political activism by middle- and upper-class citizens. They contend that the leaders of Prop. 13 surfed on the organizational crest provided by the numerous pre-existing, decentralized, community-based, tax limitation organizations and homeowners associations (Citrin 1984; Lo 1990).

In his many writings on the subject, Citrin, a political scientist, thoroughly credits the importance of rising property taxes and the prevalent perception of unresponsive governments for the passage of Jarvis-Gann. A theme found in his writings that is equally strong, though, is that Proposition 13 was a genuine middle-class, populist uprising. Extrapolating from his own as well as Mervin Field's public opinion survey data, Citrin argues that the "tax revolt" was a spontaneous, decentralized, "popular movement" (Citrin 1984, 3). Using a military analogy, Citrin writes (Ibid.):

Impatient with the ordinary processes of legislation, angry citizens took matters into their own hands to propose far-reaching and enduring restrictions on the authority of elected officials to tax and spend. Like bands of guerrilla army in the process of formation, state and local units of tax rebels sprung up independently and operated with relatively little coordination.

With little evidence other than public opinion polls to support his claim, Citrin nonetheless asserts that the tax revolt did not have a "developed a central command structure," as the "relationships among the various organizations dedicated to reducing the size of government tend[ed] to be informal and spasmodic" (Ibid.).

Arguing that the leaders of the tax rebels consisted of "political outsiders," Citrin contends that they "recruited mainly from groups on the fringe of the dominant institutions in American society" (Ibid.). The organizational "core" of the "grass-roots" movement, according to Citrin, was Jarvis' United Organization [sic] of Taxpayers, which "grafted their campaign onto local taxpayer and homeowner associations" (Sears and Citrin 1982, 26). Utilizing the ballot initiative, the tax rebels were able to wage a successful campaign against "the virtually united opposition of the state's political elite (Smith and Citrin, 1979, 1). By circumventing the unresponsive political system in its dual assault on property taxes and government programs, Prop. 13, for Citrin, "represent[ed] a successful translation of mass opinion into public policy (Citrin 1984, 52).

In contrast to Citrin's rather thin empirical research on the social and organizational dimensions underlying Prop. 13, Lo, a sociologist, bases his research on over a hundred interviews he conducted with community activists who participated in the making of the "tax revolt." In his book, Small Property Versus Big Government, Lo presents extensive documentation to support his inquiry into the social origins of Prop. 13. He argues that the tax revolt "was a face-to-face social process," in which the "activists in the tax protest movement were the stewards of the great American Middle Class" (Lo, 1990, xi, xiv). "The tax revolt was made by a multitude that left no annals," Lo maintains, as it "was a revolt of communities against big government and the bureaucratic interest groups associated with it" (Ibid., xv, 45).

Like Citrin, Lo advances that the success of Jarvis-Gann can be traced to the largely undocumented and unheralded work carried out by thousands of people throughout California who had assembled in hundreds of community associations. Lo hails the tax revolt as a "popular movement" which arose from the labors of these unsung heroes. "Countless small meetings and discussions among neighbors," Lo writes, "formed the ideas that shaped the political direction of the tax revolt" (Ibid., 43). The drive for petition signatures to place the measure on the ballot, for example, was "sustained by homeowners groups and other community organizations" (Ibid., 196). Suburbanites forged the way.

Early on, according to Lo, the tax limitation movement in California "had no direction" (Ibid., xiii). During the late 1960s and early 1970s, tax protests "flared up," but they lacked "multistrata alliances" (Lo 1984, 301-306). As the tax limitation movement gained headway, though, control of the ballot initiative drifted up the socio-economic ladder. The tax revolt, according to Lo, became more and more dominated by "suburban businesses and professionals who used their skills, resources, and influence in their communities to organize a campaign directed against the higher levels of government and other corporatist institutions" (Lo 1990, 197). By election day, "homeowners in upper-middle-class locales and the leading small businesses in those communities worked together and developed common interests" (Lo 1990, 158). "Proposition 13 succeeded," according to Lo, "because a multistrata alliance had emerged between homeowners and local landed elites" (Lo 1984, 310). Jarvis did not lead, but "had" behind him "a grassroots movement" (Ibid., 172).

Celebrating these small property owners who supposedly made Proposition 13 a reality, Lo documents the emerging sense of political efficacy felt by many ordinary homeowners. These predominately middle- and upper-class homeowners who allied themselves with small community business people "came together around common beliefs about the unresponsive power of government" (Ibid., 142). "The participants in tax protests," Lo writes, "hoped to recapture their power as citizens" (Ibid., 169). The June 6 initiative allowed property owners not only to lash out against unresponsive government elites who were excessively assessing their properties, but actually to set their own property tax levels. "Tax policy was not being made by the politicians," Lo argues, "but by a social movement" (Ibid., 2). The people, in defiance of the special interests and government officials who were largely opposed to Jarvis-Gann, would not be thwarted.

Throughout the campaign for Prop. 13, the "populist" struggle for property tax reform was led by volunteers. "The tax revolt movement that succeeded in putting Proposition 13 on the ballot," Lo claims, "was not professionally managed" (Ibid., 45). Rather, Lo contends (Ibid.):

From the early protests in the 1950s to the gathering of a million and a half signatures that placed Proposition 13 on the ballot, none of the leaders of the movement drew a salary. The movement was a shifting coalition of small groups of homeowners and taxpayers. The groups maintained only a tenuous connection to an umbrella group, the United Organizations of Taxpayers, and directed their own community activities to reduce property taxes.

Lo claims that it was not until after the passage of Jarvis-Gann that "paid political consultants and advertising agencies" dominated the movement (Lo 1984, 320-21). For Lo, the small, decentralized groups of ordinary citizens -- not "Howard Jarvis, the media-appointed hero of Proposition 13," and his United Organizations of Taxpayers -- were the ones who led the drive for Prop. 13 (Lo 1990, xi).

Tapping the Public Mood: Howard Jarvis, Populist Entrepreneur

When we begin to dig beneath the surface of the conventional wisdom, it becomes evident that Prop. 13 was not a spontaneous, mass uprising. There was a potent public mood, but as scholars have revealed, it was not monolithic, as journalists largely have assumed. Nor was Prop. 13 the natural outgrowth of the community-based citizens groups, as Lo, Citrin, and scores of journalists have claimed. While the numerous unheralded homeowner and tax limitation associations did indeed give the tax limitation cause a sense of depth, they were not central to either the organizational or financial effort that placed Prop. 13 on the ballot or insured its success at the polls. Prop. 13 was a well orchestrated, top-down ballot initiative campaign. Jarvis-Gann did not constitute a populist movement. Rather, Howard Jarvis, the engineer of Prop. 13, successfully detected the widespread but diffuse public mood and crafted a ballot initiative which enabled citizens to vent their collective anger.

Scholars and journalists who have championed the populist underpinnings of Prop. 13 have tended to neglect in their analyses the crucial role played by Jarvis and his two support

organizations -- the United Organizations of Taxpayers (UOT) and the Los Angeles Apartment Owners Association (LAAOA). Jarvis, through these two organizations, was able to tap into the very real negative public mood over rising property taxes and unresponsive government. As populist entrepreneur, Jarvis successfully captured the palpable public mood and offered his pet initiative -- which he had been peddling for over a dozen years -- as the solution to the property tax problem. As a result, the process of the actual campaign for Jarvis-Gann was far less populist, grassroots, and community-based than is assumed. Proposition 13 was not, as Jarvis was fond of saying, "a people's movement" (Monroe 1978). Ordinary people were only nominally involved in the campaign for Prop. 13. Rather, vested commercial property interests -- particularly apartment owners and realtors -- were the key to the organizational and financial success of Jarvis' initiative.

As shown in the previous section, the conventional wisdom regarding the extreme negative public mood in California prior to the June 6, 1978 election is well-founded. The scientific polling done before the election recorded the general disgust of citizens for rising property taxes and unresponsive government. The Serrano decision and the loss of local control over public education very well might have added fuel for middle- and upper-class support for Jarvis-Gann. In addition, the growing number of local tax limitation and homeowners associations, even though they were not central to the organizational or financial success of Proposition 13, surely indicated the displeasure of many middle and upper middle-class homeowners with the property tax situation. The public mood was ready, and Howard Jarvis, playing the role of populist entrepreneur, was ready to prime it.

The Rise of Howard Jarvis

Jarvis was no political neophyte in 1978. Earning close to a million dollars from a number of successful industrial ventures he developed in southern California, Jarvis retired from the world of business in 1962 (Jarvis 1979a, 280). Fond of saying how he "made a whole shitpot full of money during the Depression and I've always worked my ass off" (Carroll 1980, 64), Jarvis and his wife Estelle nevertheless lived in a modest house in the Fairfax area of Los Angeles, near Beverly Hills. Just as he was retiring, Jarvis entered the world of politics. Although as a younger man he had dabbled in Republican party politics, in 1962 he made a primary bid for the Republican nomination for US Senate. Jarvis wound up losing the race by 100,000 votes. He would later lose his two other bids for public office. In 1970, Jarvis lost a statewide race for State Board of Equalization (Jarvis claims Governor Ronald Reagan friends urged him to run), and in 1977, he came up short in the primary for Mayor of Los Angeles (Jarvis 1979a, 33-34; 41). Jarvis claims he ran for public office his final two times purely in order to further his tax limitation agenda (Ibid., 34, 41).

Jarvis, of course, would not leave his mark in California as an elected official, but as one of their most vociferous critics. Although losing the primary election in 1962, Jarvis gained valuable name recognition in conservative political circles. A "[l]ife-long activist for lowering taxes," some of his Los Angeles neighbors recruited him that year to help establish and then become State Chairman of a new citizens group, the United Organizations of Taxpayers (Ibid., 25). According to Jarvis, his neighbors "felt they were paying too much.

They asked me to help them write the by-laws for this organization. . . .So the more I got into the tax situation, the more I liked it. I felt somebody had to do this" (Busch 1978, 4). The group met once a month at the home of Leona Magidson, who would later become the Treasurer of the organization during the Prop. 13 campaign. In 1965, Jarvis and the members decided to incorporate the group. Local tax groups were encouraged to affiliate themselves with UOT. Tax limitation became an obsession for Jarvis. "I'm doing it," Jarvis professed patriotically, "because I've had a very successful and happy life in this country and a great many this have not. I'm doing it because nobody else had either the brains or the guts or the money to do it. . . .I'm determined to do this before I kick off and go across" (McDougal 1978).

Jarvis and the United Organizations of Taxpayers (which served as a loose umbrella group and clearinghouse for other taxpayers associations in southern California) launched its first property tax limitation initiative campaign in 1968. The group, though, failed to collect enough signatures to place the measure on the ballot that year. In 1971, the group launched its second unsuccessful campaign to collect signatures to place their initiative on the ballot. During those early years, several members of the UOT worked on other campaigns aimed at lowering taxes at both the state and local levels. They also contested several Los Angeles ballot measures, and worked on (after their own measures had failed to qualify) unsuccessful tax limitation initiatives written by Los Angeles County tax assessor Philip Watson in 1968 and 1972. In 1973, Jarvis and others in the organization supported Governor Ronald Reagan's unsuccessful revenue limitation referendum, Proposition 1 (Jarvis 1979a, 32-40). During this period, Jarvis enhanced his reputation as a tax rebel. In 1970, the Los Angeles Times noted his prominence: "Jarvis in the past five years has become the chief spokesman for a large group of disgruntled California property owners who are convinced, simply, that they pay too much of the cost of government" (Jarvis 1979a, 25). While their own ballot initiatives were frustrated, Jarvis and his band of loyal followers were not dissuaded. "All we had was guts," Jarvis claimed. "And when we started out we knew we were going to stay there till we won. We didn't care how long or how hard or how rough it was, we were going to stay there until we won" (Jarvis 1979b, 3).

After a four year hiatus from being directly involved in a statewide tax limitation ballot initiative, Jarvis and the UOT launched its third initiative campaign in 1976. Between October 1976 and March 1977, Jarvis and his supporters gathered over 500,000 signatures, but came up short of the 557,000 valid signatures required to place the measure on the June 6, 1977 ballot (Jarvis 1979b, 3; CFPPC 1977a). During the 1976-77 signature collection campaign, the UOT was not a financially robust organization. Based on the monetary contributions it received between January 1976 and March 1977, the group only had slightly more than 4,000 members paying the \$5 membership fee (CFPPC 1976b; 1977a). The group received a total of only \$22,053 in membership fees over a fourteen month period, but received additional financial support from the Los Angeles Board of Realtors Political Action Committee, which contributed \$350 to the UOT, and the Los Angeles Apartment Owners Association, which "independently" spent \$5,600 on advertisements promoting the initiative (Ibid.). Jarvis claims (Jarvis 1979a, 23):

I never got a nickel. . .nor did any other officer or director. Neither did anyone else who was associated with us. . . .Not only did I never receive a nickel for my work, I spent about \$100,000 out of my own pocket over the fifteen years. I wore out two cars driving around the state and spent thousands of dollars on motels and meals while I was traveling around and leading the drive to lower taxes. And I bought typewriters, a press to print news releases on, stamps -- you name it.

But during the unsuccessful 1976-77 campaign, the UOT paid at least one person \$90 to stuff envelopes, paid a public relations consultant \$4,415 to "place [an] ad" in the Los Angeles Times, and reimbursed Jarvis \$450 for some of his travels (CFPPC 1977a).

Even though they failed to place their previous three property tax limitation initiatives on the ballot, Jarvis and the core members of the UOT remained undaunted. In June, 1977, following the UOT's third failure to collect enough signatures to qualify for the ballot, Jarvis and his followers "had a meeting and cried in our beer and were so damn disgusted, decided we wouldn't start on a new one [initiative campaign] until the next day. The next day we started on Proposition 13" (Busch 1979, 4-5). An aide of Jarvis' called Paul Gann, a former car and real estate salesman residing in Carmichael, a suburb of Sacramento, to see if he and his organization, the People's Advocate, wanted to join forces. The next day Gann flew to Los Angeles to meet with Jarvis and talk strategy (Gann 1988, 18). Gann, who had incorporated his organization in 1974, had not been involved in property taxes until 1976 (Glenchur 1978, 4). In 1976 and 1977, Gann and his supporters in northern California failed to collect enough signatures to place their property tax limitation measures on the ballot. But the People's Advocate was over 10,000 members strong and had a solid organizational base in northern California (Gann 1988, 11). With both Gann and Jarvis failing to collect enough valid signatures on their own, they reluctantly joined forces.

After settling on the language of Jarvis' 389 word initiative that was to become Prop. 13, Jarvis and Gann rarely coordinated their efforts. On July 6, 1977, the two organizations began to circulate petitions independently of one another in order to meet the December 2, 1977 deadline for the submission of petitioned signatures. Needing valid signatures from 499,846 registered voters (which was 8% of the previous vote for Governor), Jarvis hoped that Gann and his organization would be able to collect 150,000 signatures from the 50 northern counties in California, while Jarvis and his group would collect 500,000 from the eight southern counties (Busch 1978, 5). Jarvis claims to have contributed \$1,000 a week to Gann and his organization to help him in his effort to collect signatures; the UOT's financial records, though, reveal that it contributed a total of only \$5,000 to Gann's People's Advocate between June and December 1977 (Jarvis 1979a, 50-51; CFPPC 1977b). For the most part, though, it was true that Jarvis and Gann did not communicate with each another during their separate drives to collect signatures. According to the soft-spoken Gann, "We just each went our own way," and did not "divide up the chores" (Gann 1988, 36).

In the northern part of California and in the Central Valley, Gann and the People's Advocate successfully gathered over 150,000 valid signatures. They relied on "people writing in, volunteering, calling, phoning day and night. Volunteering to circulate petitions,

do anything they can do" (Gann 1988, 20). But the organization also welcomed the assistance of the business community to gather signatures. According to Gann (Lo 1990, 171):

I had chambers of commerce all over the State of California helping me, I had real estate people in every section of the State of California. In fact, they make the difference, believe me -- small business and real estate. Those people . . . who were out there selling that property, were the people that had taken that petition [around]. And they obtained signatures and signatures and signatures.

Perhaps even more important than the chambers of commerce was the role various apartment owners' associations played in getting their tenants to sign the petitions. As the coordinator of Gann's petition drive in the Central Valley explained, "What really put across Proposition 13 was the apartment owners' association. . . . [T]hey gave money and they had meetings and they got people to sign petitions and really, I think that's what put it across" (Ibid.).

In southern California, Jarvis and his United Organizations of Taxpayers ran the show. Jarvis was a frequent guest on talk radio and wrote a newspaper column entitled "The People Must Know" which he sent out unsolicited to 140 publications (Jarvis 1979a, 49-53). On the radio and in his column, he urged people to sign and circulate the petitions and return them to headquarters by the filing date, December 2, 1977. Jarvis gave hundreds of speeches, held press conferences, and wrote fund-raising letters for the UOT (Ibid., 48-49). During the campaign, Jarvis said (Fox 1978):

I didn't comprehend this during the 15 years we worked on 13. I didn't comprehend the size it was going to be. I was running around the track like a horse with blinders on. If I had known it was going to take 15 years, if I had known it was going to take 100,000 bucks out of my pocket, then I might have been too chicken to have gone on.

He recruited volunteers -- "most of them women" -- to circulate the petitions. "I was able to cross the state and get twenty women in San Jose and twenty-three in Oakland and eighteen in Pasadena and thirty in Palm Springs and eleven in Santa Monica and twelve in Culver City to go out and collect signatures every day" (Ibid., 52-53). Jarvis served as "the political strategist, the media man, the copywriter and the janitor. I was the driver of the tractor" (Ibid., 112). Refusing to pay people to collect signatures, Jarvis even enlisted his wife Estelle to organize a "crew of women to gather signatures. She would pick them up in her car every day, make their lunch, and take them to a supermarket where they stood outside and got people to sign our petitions" (Ibid., 23).

Over the course of the campaign, Jarvis did not think much of his co-author, Gann, or his organization, the People's Advocate. Jarvis claims he and Gann "never had an argument or a bad word during the 13 campaign, but I became aware of his capacities" (Ibid., 145). Calling Gann a "Johnny-come-lately who arrived on the scene after I and the other members of the United Organizations of Taxpayers had done all the heavy work," Jarvis claimed that "We would have won with or without Paul Gann" (Ibid., 142). In fact, it turned out that UOT did collect more than enough signatures on its own to place the measure on the ballot. An aide to Jarvis commented on election night, "We thought we needed the

150,000 votes [Gann's] group could deliver in petition signatures. We alone got a million names and we didn't need him at all" (Time 1979). When the signatures were finally tallied by the Office of the Secretary of State in late December, 1977, the two organizations had collected 1,263,698 valid signatures, the most ever for a ballot initiative.

The Campaign for Proposition 13

In early 1978, soon after Jarvis and Gann qualified their tax limitation initiative for the primary ballot, the state legislature began to take notice of the rising support for property tax reform. During the previous session, the highly partisan state legislature missed several opportunities to push through property tax reform. Senator Peter Behr, a liberal Republican from Marin County, became the unlikely legislative redeemer. The "author of a dark-horse property-tax bill that languished in committee while lawmakers fought over other relief plans," Behr's property tax relief bill had died in committee the previous year (Lawrence 1978). But in January, Behr's bill "picked up support as legislators looked around for something to counter the Jarvis property-tax initiative" (Ibid.). Behr's bill proposed to raise homeowner property tax exemptions, thereby reducing property-tax bills by half. It also included a revenue limit on cities and counties and a 5 percent transfer tax on the sale of owner-occupied homes (Ibid.). Governor Brown spoke in favor of Behr's bill, calling it "the only glimmer of hope left" for property tax relief in 1978 (Long Beach Independent 1978a).

Despite the urgency, the bill did not move through the legislature smoothly. The California Association of Realtors comprised of 116,000 members mounted a strong campaign against Behr's bill. The realtors argued that the tax on home-sales profits would severely hurt their sales. Behr's bill "sparked the biggest 'red alert' in the group's history last week," according to lobbyist Dugald Gilleis, prompting the association to send letters "to each of its 25,000 brokers asking them to get in touch with their legislator and urge opposition" (Long Beach Independent 1978b). After intense deliberation and several amendments, both the Senate and the Assembly narrowly passed Behr's bill by slim two-thirds majorities. In early March, Governor Brown quickly signed the bill, which was then referred to the citizens for their approval. Behr's bill, which was listed on the June 6 ballot as Proposition 8, was praised by the legislature and Governor Brown as a moderate alternative to Jarvis' more extreme measure.

As the campaign for Prop. 13 heated up in the spring of 1978, with Jarvis and Behr sparring with each other at public forums, the media began to cast Prop. 13 as a grassroots, populist endeavor, and Behr's bill as the establishment's long-overdue response. While often critical of the actual substance of Jarvis' tax limitation measure (the property tax cut would devastate schools and public services), the media tended to paint a positive picture of the overall initiative process that Jarvis was heading. Headlines in the influential Los Angeles Times, which had editorialized against Jarvis' measure from the start, touted Prop. 13 as "Grass Roots," a "Rebellion," and a "Revolt" spawned by the people (Los Angeles Times 1978a; 1978b; 1978c). In a study of the headlines and subheadings in the Los Angeles Times, Sociologist Herman Turk found "by the end of April the large size and visibility of California's property taxes were cited, as were public figures claiming widespread anger at

taxes and at wasteful spending by government," and in the month of May "carried the themes of high taxes, taxpayer unrest" and "the large volume of activity and support that had gotten the initiative on the ballot" (Turk 1979, 341-342). One week prior to the election, according to Turk, the Times paid tribute to the 1.2 million people who had signed the petition (Ibid., 343). Instead of focusing their attention on the actual process of the campaign being waged by Jarvis, the media increasingly referred to Prop. 13 as the genuine populist tax revolt.⁴

Journalists also stressed the populist rhetoric of the outspoken, irreverent author of Proposition 13 who was energizing the public mood. Jarvis, like the substance of his initiative, was criticized personally at times by the media, but generally he was championed as the great protector of home-owners. The media devoured Jarvis's colorful style. "I've made a pledge to a bunchy of poor taxpayers," Jarvis liked to say, "and we're never going to quit" (Salisbury 1978). Jarvis called the Behr bill "a fraud." "Instead of returning the power to the people by having it in writing in the constitution how they will be taxed," Jarvis screamed, "the Behr Bill just returns the whole thing to those clowns who have been bungling it for years. And the whole thing starts all over again" (McDougal 1978). Behr admitted that he could not match Jarvis' "rhetoric," and accused his opponent of "never discussing facts" (Scheibman 1978). Jarvis, in response, called Behr, a "senile old man" (Egelko 1978) and referred to the league of Women Voters and Common Cause, both opposing Prop. 13, as "phony left-wing fronts" (Long Beach Independent 1978c). Calling himself a "pain in the ass" and "a rugged bastard who's had his head kicked in a thousand times by the government" (Time 1978), Jarvis' self-deprecating raillery diffused the media's attention away from the actual operation of the pro-13 campaign. Featuring Jarvis in a story less than a month prior to the election, Ronald Soble, a staff writer for the Los Angeles Times, wrote (Soble 1978):

At first glance, it would seem that Jarvis has a rag-tag approach to stumping for his cause. He carries a few notes in a briefcase. He is in the habit of making last-minute connections for transportation to engagements and, indeed, does not even show up for

⁴Not until after the June election did any journalist write critically of Jarvis. After Prop. 13 passed, syndicated columnist Jack Anderson wrote a scathing account of Jarvis and the questionable motives underlying the measure. Anderson asserted that Jarvis had been "active in right-wing, money raising scams," and was "a veteran political con man who has scored some noteworthy stings over the years." Anderson and his research assistants traced "Jarvis and two associates, William Morrison and Norton H. Nathan," to a shady operation in 1964. Jarvis and his associates purportedly "set up shop in Los Angeles as 'Businessmen for Goldwater,'" soliciting thousands of dollars for the Republican candidate's campaign for the presidency. Evidently Jarvis' committee was not approved or sanctioned by Goldwater's campaign organization or the Republican National Committee, and no money ever made it to Goldwater. Jarvis, according to Anderson, used the scheme again in 1976, when he chaired the 'Friends for Hayakawa Committee,' "which raised \$57,454 ostensibly for the Senate campaign of California Senator Hayakawa." But according to the Hayakawa financial records, no money ever was contributed by Jarvis' group (Anderson 1978).

some. And, he claims, there are times when he forgets what group he is addressing until just minutes before he speaks. Much of this is a facade. . . . For all of his homespun style, Jarvis should not be sold short.

Although they provided a rich portrait of Jarvis, journalists neglected to probe very deeply the operations of Jarvis' two well-oiled machines, the UOT and the LAAOA.

Jarvis' Organizational and Financial Base #1: The United Organizations of Taxpayers

While his populist rhetoric was crucial for tapping into the public mood against property taxes, Jarvis and his two organizations played key roles in the orchestration of the successful campaign. In 1978, Jarvis variously claimed that the United Organizations of Taxpayers had signed 120,000 to 200,000 dues-paying members (each paying the \$5 membership fee), which included people who belonged to other tax limitation associations (Jarvis 1979a, 25; Kershner 1978). During the signature collection phase of the campaign, the UOT had relied on volunteers from these community-based groups to collect the million-plus signatures. Jarvis claimed that the UOT had not "asked for money, but contributions [were] coming in daily. None of them [were] over \$50," as "we were going to try our damndest to get people voluntarily to send in a million dollars" (Schmidt 1978). Jarvis also declared that the reliance on volunteers continued throughout the rest of the campaign, as he touted the organization's reliance on "1 million hours -- voluntary, non paid help -- extending 15 years" (CFPPC 1977b).

Contrary to the conventional wisdom (fostered by Jarvis and perpetuated by the media and scholars) that the "tax revolt movement" was comprised of volunteers and "was not professionally managed" (Lo 1990, 45), the UOT did operate as a professional organization. Jarvis equipped it to raise an enormous amount of money for the passage of Prop. 13. Soon after the Secretary of State's office had validated the signatures and placed the measure on the ballot in January, the UOT became a well-oiled fund-raising machine. Although unreported by the media, Jarvis' various pronouncements frequently contradicted the committee campaign statements that the UOT filed with the state. For example, during the signature collection phase of the campaign, Jarvis claimed the UOT "spent about \$28,500 and we finished with \$13,000 in the bank" (Schmidt 1978). In actuality, between June 28 and December 30, 1977, UOT received monetary contributions of \$49,584, and spent (running up a deficit) \$50,442 (CFPPC 1977b). In addition, once again contrary to Jarvis' assertions, the UOT did rely on professional assistance during their signature collection campaign. While polishing up the UOT's populist facade, Jarvis hired a Van Nuys fund-raising organization, Romagen Corporation, to publicize the signature gathering campaign. Between June and December, 1977, the UOT paid Romagen \$22,466 to get out their message (Ibid.).

With less than five months to go before the election, Jarvis kicked the UOT's fund-raising efforts into high gear. On February 7, 1978, Jarvis established the "Yes on 13 Committee" as a special purpose committee to raise money in support of the initiative. Under the auspices of the UOT, with Jarvis serving as its Treasurer, the Yes on 13 Committee operated out of the office of the Los Angeles Apartment Owners Association

(CFPPC 1978b). Jarvis hired an accountant, Julius Glazer (who received no mention in Jarvis' autobiography), to run the day-to-day operations of the Yes on 13 Committee. Once again contrary Jarvis' unchallenged claims that the campaign was run entirely by volunteers, Glazer was paid a handsome sum of \$37,802 by Yes on 13 for "accounting services" rendered during the late stages of the campaign (CFPPC 1978d; 1978e). Jarvis also drafted Roland Vincent, a former stockbroker for Paine, Webber who had run Alabama Governor George Wallace's 1976 presidential bid in California, to head the media and advertisement side of the operation (Furlong, 1978). Vincent contracted the services of Media & Marketing Affiliates, based in Newport Beach, to carry out most of the radio and television advertisement blitz. During the three months prior to the election, Yes on 13 paid Media & Marketing Affiliates \$425,000 to produce and air television and radio spots (CFPPC 1978c; 1978d).

To generate a constant stream of revenue for the Prop. 13 campaign, Jarvis relied heavily on soliciting contributions through mass mailings. Rather than running the operation in-house with volunteer labor, Jarvis turned over the fund-raising and promotional operation to four private groups: Romagen Corporation; Below, Tobe & Associates; The America Group; and Butcher-Forde Consulting. UOT paid Romagen, which had worked for Jarvis during the signature collection campaign, \$114,581 between January and June for its direct mail services (CFPPC 1978g). The Yes on 13 Committee paid Below, Tobe & Associates, a firm providing mailing services for commercial advertisers, \$184,000 to raise funds and publicize Proposition 13 during April and May (CFPPC 1978c). Although it failed to report its expenditures, the UOT, on behalf of Yes on 13 Committee, also paid Below, Tobe & Associates \$140,000 between April and June, 1978 for its fund-raising mass mailings (CFTB 1978). In the two weeks prior to the election, Yes on 13 paid The America Group, based out of Anaheim, \$23,889 for its computerized mailing service. Finally, Jarvis hired the Newport Beach firm, Butcher-Forde Consulting, to generate numerous fund-raising letters for Prop. 13. Jarvis alleged (Jarvis 1979a, 143):

Butcher and Forde didn't charge us a nickel for their services -- not a nickel. I met them through the campaign of State Senator John Briggs for Governor in late 1977. John Briggs was one of the first major candidates to endorse 13. Butcher and Forde thought they could piggy back John Briggs on the campaign for 13 -- or vice versa. They could send out mailers for both John Briggs and Proposition 13 at no extra cost -- except the price of paper.

According to the financial records, though, Yes on 13 paid Butcher-Forde \$29,350 late in the campaign for their radio and TV production services (CFPPC 1978d). Scratching Briggs' back, Yes on 13 also made a contribution of \$7,839 to Citizens for Senator Briggs in March (CFPPC 1978b). More significantly, though, Jarvis failed to report to the CFPPC that the Yes on 13 Committee paid a total of \$84,479 to the companies in expensive advertising commissions. Over the course of the campaign, Yes on 13 paid \$16,896 to Media & Marketing Affiliates, \$22,114 to The America Group, and \$45,469 to Butcher-Forde (CFTB 1980). Despite Jarvis' claims that "Butcher and Forde gave us a great deal and we didn't have to pay them at all for what they did" (Jarvis 1979, 144), the campaign for Prop. 13 was run by paid professionals.

Contracting with professionals to handle the mass mailing fund-raising paid off well. While there were 32 official groups campaigning and raising money for Prop. 13, the bulk of the money was raised by Jarvis' two groups, the Los Angeles-based Yes on 13 Committee and the UOT. The two committees collected \$2,022,308, which was 89 percent of the total amount raised for Prop. 13. In comparison, Gann's People's Advocate took in only \$136,480 (6 percent) of the total raised in support of the measure. Jarvis' Yes on 13 Committee raised \$1,580,433 in contributions over the four month period prior to the election (CFPPC 1978a; 1978f). Contributions made to Yes on 13 accounted for 69 percent of all contributions made to the 32 official groups which campaigned and raised money for Prop. 13. Between April 24 and May 22, and May 23 and June 30, the Committee received \$534,912 and \$744,038 in contributions respectively (CFPPC 1978c; 1978d). Contributions from close to 10,000 individuals (primarily Los Angeles residents) and businesses (primarily rental agencies or apartment owners from Los Angeles) poured in to the Yes on 13 office; checks ranged from \$25 to \$250, with an occasional check for \$1,000. The UOT also raised a substantial amount of money in the form membership dues. During the campaign, the UOT amassed \$441,875 in small contributions made by 50,000 new or renewing members (CFPPC 1978f; Carroll 1980, 62). Contrary to Jarvis' claims that the opposition was greatly out-spending his side, the supporters of Proposition 13 raised a total of \$2,279,567 and spent \$2,152,874, whereas the opponents of Prop. 13 raised a total of \$2,120,931 and spent \$2,000,204 (CFPPC 1988).

Jarvis' Organizational and Financial Base #2: The Los Angeles Apartment Owners Association

Equally crucial in the campaign for Prop. 13 as the UOT and the Yes on 13 Committee, but playing a shadow role, was the Los Angeles Apartment Owners Association. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Jarvis became known in the area as a perennial gadfly. He made frequent appearances at City Council meetings in Los Angeles and Pasadena, testifying primarily against proposed property tax increases (Kershner 1978). The Apartment Owners Association took notice, and in 1972 hired him as the Executive Director of the organization (Jarvis 1979a, 64). According to Jarvis, the association, which was losing about \$1,500 a month, approached him to head their organization. Jarvis reluctantly accepted. He claims not to have taken a salary until 1974; at that time, the association paid him \$1,700 a month (Ibid., 67). Jarvis was much more than, as James Ring Adams asserts, a "part-time lobbyist" for the organization (Adams 1984, 164). As Executive Director, Jarvis successfully lobbied the state Legislature to defeat a rent-control bill, and persuaded the Los Angeles City Council to vote against several ordinances that would have placed tight restrictions and the increase costs of apartment owners (Jarvis 1979a, 68). More importantly, Jarvis rejuvenated the organization and put it on solid financial footing. When he took over the association in 1972, it had 1,100 members; by 1978, Jarvis had boosted the membership to 5,000 (out of a total of 64,000 apartment owners in Los Angeles).

As Executive Director of the LAAOA, Jarvis worked closely with the membership. Not surprisingly, throughout the campaign opponents of Prop. 13 tried to paint him as a pawn of apartment owners. Jarvis vehemently denied the accusations (Tracy 1978, 17):

They say I'm an apartment owner and I stand to make millions of this proposition. Well, I don't own any apartments, never have. They're a lousy investment. The truth is, I don't stand to make one dime off this amendment and anybody who says different is a liar.

According to Jarvis, he "never discussed the present amendment with anybody in the apartment industry. It was none of their business. This is the United Organizations' amendment, not the Apartment Association's" (Jarvis 1979a, 69-70). Jarvis claimed that "while we were in the process of gathering signatures in 1977, the members of the apartment association asked me if I would like them to put some money in the campaign, and I said no" (Ibid., 64-65).

The evidence, though, contradicts Jarvis' claims. The two organizations were tied together closely. From the beginning of the campaign, Prop. 13 was run out of the offices of the LAAOA (as was the case two years earlier when Jarvis failed to collect enough signatures to place his 1977 initiative on the ballot). According to committee campaign statements filed by the UOT with the state, the organization received \$3,500 in 1976 and \$2,100 in 1977 in "non-monetary contributions" from the LAAOA for office space it provided (CFPPC 1976a; 1977a). During the signatures collection campaigns in 1976 and 1977, the Apartment Owners Association ran advertisements in the Los Angeles Times which reproduced the ballot initiative petitions, and urged the public to tear them out, collect signatures, and send them to the UOT (which happened to have the same address as the LAAOA). According to the UOT's own filing with the CFPPC (Ibid.):

This non-monetary "contribution" or benefit [from the LAAOA] was made or conferred totally independent of the United Organization of Taxpayers, Inc., but is reported and included herein for purposes of complete disclosure. (In other words, the UOT had nothing to do with the running of this ad and had no control over it of any kind.)

Claims notwithstanding, a cozy relationship existed between Jarvis' two organizations. During the spring of 1978, the Yes on 13 Committee was also run out of the LAAOA. According to Charles Betz, a Board Member of the UOT (Lo 1990, 172):

The Apartment Association was deeply involved in Proposition 13. Howard Jarvis was the director of the Apartment Association of Los Angeles County and used that as one of his bases to raise money and to conduct the campaign...They made large contributions; they solicited their membership for contributions.

The LAAOA not only contributed office space to UOT; it also supplied Jarvis with a ready-made base of financial support.

As Executive Director, Jarvis made full use of the membership of the LAAOA to financially support the campaign for Proposition 13. In January, 1978 Jarvis launched a mass mailing to all the apartment owners in California, "asking for a contribution of 1% of their gross annual revenues from rent," which he claimed they would recoup after the passage of his measure (Political Animal 1978). The computerized mailing generated over \$120,000 in contributions to the Yes on 13 Committee (Lo 1990, 172). Jarvis also mailed numerous fund-raising letters to the 5,000 apartment owners belonging to the LAAOA,

soliciting financial contributions. According to Jarvis, the average member of the LAAOA owned eleven units, with the members owning a combined total of more than 50,000 units (Jarvis 1979a, 67). In a letter dated April 3, 1978, addressed to the members of the LAAOA, Jarvis claimed that if Prop. 13 was defeated, "we are the big losers." He requested in the letter that the apartment owners contribute \$1 million to the Yes on 13 Committee. The amount of the contribution should be made according to a sliding scale based on the number of apartment units owned (Jarvis 1978):

If you own from 2 to 5 units, I suggest a donation of \$25. For 5 to 10 units, \$50 would be appreciated. 10 to 15 units demands \$100. For 25 units or more, a contribution of \$250 would be fair. This might seem like a lot to ask, but it is peanuts compared to your annual tax savings under Proposition 13.

Jarvis' fund-raising letter also included a chart detailing the expected property tax savings for people who owned property worth between \$250,000 and \$5,000,000. Although Prop. 13 had no provision mandating apartment owners to pass some of their property tax windfalls to their renters, Jarvis emphasized that the apartment owners should try to "convince your tenants that lower property taxes mean lower rents. Renter votes could decide this election" (Ibid.).

Soon after Jarvis sent out his letters of solicitation, the money began to flow in constantly to the Yes on 13 Committee from Los Angeles apartment owners. Thousands of contributions in the amounts of \$100 and \$250 were mailed into the Yes on 13 Committee, along with over \$166,000 in contributions which were over \$1,000 each. In addition to the contributions made by the individual members of the Apartment Owners Association, the organization contributed \$31,068 to the Yes on 13 Committee (two separate checks for \$15,534 each) (CFPPC 1988). Of the \$166,853 in contributions to the committees in support of Prop. 13 that were \$1,000 or more, only \$13,505 (8%) came from citizens groups. The balance came from apartment owners and associations, industrial parks, and realtor associations (CFPPC 1978f, F-8, F-9). Contrary to Lo's assertion that "Jarvis tapped relatively small donors" (Lo 1990, 173), Jarvis targeted much of his fund-raising strategy directly at prosperous apartment owners.

Conclusion: Proposition 13 -- A *Faux* Populist Moment

The downplaying of Jarvis' role in campaign for Proposition 13 by scholars is certainly understandable. On more than one occasion, Jarvis was known to loudly trumpet his messianic role "as instigator and implementer of this movement" (Jarvis 1979a, 9). While his megalomaniacal pronouncements, such as, "I guess nobody chose me to lead the parade. I guess I chose myself. If I hadn't done it, I don't think anybody else in California would have done it. Nobody" (Ibid., 129) were indeed wearisome and need to be taken with a grain of salt, Jarvis was the primary force behind the campaign for lower property taxes. Without Jarvis' leadership, and perhaps more importantly the financial resources and organizational support of the UOT and the LAAOA, Proposition 13 would not have been a success on election day, much less have been on the ballot in the first place. Due to the highly centralized nature of the ballot initiative process, and the lack of active participation

by everyday citizens, I suggest that Prop. 13 can be best understood as a *faux* populist moment.

As suggested earlier, *faux* populism is a fleeting expression of populist-sounding rhetoric which lacks the underlying sustenance and active laboring of the people. *Faux* populist moments are orchestrated by populist entrepreneurs -- individuals who are able to tap a prevailing, but ill-defined public mood, attach their own pet solution to the perceived problem, and mobilize temporary popular support for their measure. Offered to the people in the tangible form of a ballot initiative, the *faux* populist moment is ephemerally realized at a voting booth. Once the vote is taken, the *faux* populist moment is over.

In the traditional sense, then, Prop. 13 was not a populist movement. The renowned California ballot initiative, while wildly successful at the polls, lacked many of the qualities associated with populist social movements. With the exception of the efforts of some small, disjointed homeowners and taxpayers associations, the campaign for Prop. 13 revealed no active toiling of the masses. Rather, Howard Jarvis, acting as populist entrepreneur, successfully tapped Californians' amorphous anger toward their rising property taxes and unresponsive state and local governments, and laid the groundwork for them. Prop. 13, under the guarded direction of Howard Jarvis and his organizations, was not a grassroots, educative form of protest involving the active participation of the masses. While populist in its rhetoric, Prop. 13 was centrally orchestrated from above. Contrary to most accounts, Jarvis did not draw his financial support from ordinary taxpayers. Rather, he relied heavily on corporate property interests for his organizational and financial backing. These particular realities of Prop. 13 diverge notably from the widely held conventional wisdom shared by most journalists and scholars.

The conflation of public opinion and social action, which has led to the widespread notion that Prop. 13 was a grassroots, populist revolt of middle- and upper-middle class Californians, is problematic. A positive public opinion response for a ballot measure is hardly equatable to social action. As Political Scientist, Michael Engle, discerningly writes (Engle 1979, 13):

[O]ne must first reject the concept of public opinion as somehow spontaneous, self-generating, and self-organizing. Revolts of any kind do not organize themselves and political ideas and directions do not arise out of the random whims of individuals. The success of Proposition 13 rested on a particular set of political circumstances in California in 1978: a competent and experienced set of organizers with a clear special interest; a rapidly rising property tax; a fairly large statewide conservative political base; and a huge unused state surplus.

The considerable showing of public opinion in support of the ballot initiative did not constitute a populist movement. Rather than a spontaneous mobilization of the masses, populist entrepreneur Jarvis successfully tapped the public mood and coupled his pet solution, Proposition 13, to the perceived problem. Utilizing the organizational and financial resources of his two groups, Jarvis was able to manufacture substantial popular support for his measure on the June 6 ballot.

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