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Fox Populism in the Great Recession

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the
degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Communication

by

Brandon Reece Peck

Committee in Charge:

Professor Chandra Mukerji, Chair
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2012

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The Dissertation of Brandon Reece Peck is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego
2012

Dedication

To my wife and eternal “road dog” Mercedes, to my sister for insisting I try college, and to all my family in Utah for reminding me that I’m not “neat” just because I wrote a dissertation.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Fox Populism in the Great Recession

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

University of California, San Diego

Professor Chandra Mukerji, Chair

Too often critics treat Fox News's populist brand and voice, its claim to stick up for the little guy as a gimmicky type of charlatanism that is used to convey simple and misleading news stories. However, in this dissertation, I demonstrate how Fox News's populist journalistic style is in fact a sophisticated and complex form of political communication, one that requires great performative skill to embody, a deep knowledge of traditional political discourses, and an astute awareness of the key social and cultural cleavages active in a given historical moment.

To capture the complexity of Fox News's populist mode of address, in this study, I conduct a critical-textual analysis of Fox News's top three programs during the late-2000s Recession: *Glenn Beck*, *Hannity*, and *The O'Reilly Factor*. This involves a close

reading of the “imagined community” Fox News’s style is designed to address and how its style is crafted to create a political identity for viewers. While partisan identification with the Republican Party and political conservatism defines the broadest parameters of Fox's imagined community, the real power and ideological utility of Fox News’s mode of address, I argue, derive from its cultural referents, particularly, how it aligns deep moral values and social archetypes from the American populist rhetorical tradition with the political right, marking populism as conservative. In this first half of this dissertation, I develop a theoretical model for interpreting Fox News’s unique populist address, which includes an analysis of how Fox News’s top programs attempt to draw symbolic linkages between political conservatism and the white working-class. In the second half of the dissertation, I demonstrate the power of this rhetorical approach by showing how Fox News’s top programs framed news about the late-2000s Recession to fashion a conservative economic agenda.

Introduction

The history of style embraces, not the reasons men voted Democratic or Republican, but only why it was *natural* for them to vote and to vote only for the candidates of a single party.

-Michael McGerr, 1986

Let us acknowledge that the conservative comeback of the last few years is indeed something unique in the history of American social movement: a mass conversion to free-market theory as a response to hard times.

-Thomas Frank, 2012

Since the early 2000s Fox News has become more than a media corporation. It has become an ever-present signifier in American popular culture, a touchstone both viewers and non-viewers, conservatives and liberals alike refer to when discussing their own political allegiances, lines of opposition, values and even tastes. When you enter a room where Fox News is on the television screen, you are prompted to think more about the political identities of those watching than the news content. The style of Fox News, its rhetoric, its tone, its aesthetic project a populist social identity and expresses what Fox represents as a working-class brand of intelligence.

Because the network is one of the strongest symbols of political conservatism today and because it is best known for its opinion programming (as opposed to its “news” programming), critics have described it as a throw back to the nineteenth-century

press (Ryfe, 2006; Skocpol, 2012).¹ What this means is that Fox News’s signature opinion programs do not follow the professional values of twentieth-century journalism, namely, disinterested analysis and non-partisan reporting. However, the nineteenth-century comparison is apt in way that few observers recognize. Fox uses an “engaged” cultural style that is designed to make and reinforce an association between the working-class social majority and conservative politics.

In his book *The Decline of Popular Politics* (1986), Michael McGerr argues that what made the nineteenth-century partisan press so popular and conducive to mass democratic participation was its “political style,” that is, how it discussed, practiced and displayed politics.² In addition to presenting polices and candidates to the public and serving an informative function, these papers—like the street parades and political campaigns they promoted—provided a ritual occasion and public context for the expression of group identities and communal values. Like the nineteenth-century press, the salient quality of Fox News’s style of journalism is how it uses partisanship as a cultural vehicle to affirm its viewer’s identity and membership in social groups and how,

¹ According to a YouGov’s Brandindex survey conducted in 2010 that compared which top five brands Republicans and Democrats most identify with, Fox News is cited as the number one brand that Republicans identified with whereas the number one brand Democrats identified with is Google. Ives, N. (2010, October 25). Consumers' Hearts Bleed Red--and Blue: Top U.S. Brands Favored Much Higher Among One Political Party or the Other, Survey Finds. *AdvertisingAge*. Retrieved from <http://adage.com/article/news/top-u-s-brands-favored-democrats-republicans/146663/>.

² In their book *Echo Chamber* (2008), Kathleen Jamieson and Joseph Cappella’s research draws a correlation between the style of contemporary conservative media and increased political participation showing that conservative media audiences tend be some of the most politically active audiences in the entire media market. The style of conservative media, they suggest, gives the audience a greater sense of urgency, a sense that the content being covered matters and, most importantly, that the viewer has agency to do something to affect policy. Fox News’s audience’s belief in their political agency and their high degree of political participation was no better exemplified by the emergence of the Tea Party movement and its affect on the 2010 midterm elections. As Williamson and Skocpol note in their recent book *The Tea Party and the Remaking of the Republican Conservatism* (2012), a poll taken in April 2010 showed that, “63% of Tea Party supporters watched Fox News, compared to 11% of the all respondents” (p. 135).

conversely, it endows the viewer's social identity with greater meaning by giving it a central place in American politics and by making it part of a grand story of struggle.

Even though this dissertation is centrally interested in how Fox News asserts conservative ideology, particularly, free market ideology, its primary objective is not to compare the network's ideology with the "truth" or the facts. Instead, I want to do what few have adequately done, which is to closely examine the "imagined community" that Fox News's style is designed to address and how its style is crafted to create a political identity for viewers. While partisan identification with the Republican Party and political conservatism defines the broadest parameters of Fox's imagined community, the real power and ideological utility of Fox News's mode of address, I want to suggest, derive from its cultural referents, particularly how it aligns deep cultural values and social archetypes from the American populist tradition with the political right, marking populism as conservative.

To understand why Fox News's partisan style is so popular and so effective at shaping our national political language, one must not simply critique its political content; one must analyze those elements of Fox News's mode of address that speak to the audience more indirectly. For me, the interesting question is *not* how Fox News promotes political bias, but rather, how Fox News's journalistic mode of address makes the conservative political positions of the program and hosts seem a natural outcome of the hosts' core values and their loyalty to "regular" Americans, the popular social bloc they repeatedly self-identify with.

What distinguishes Fox News's style of journalism from that of its competitors and rivals in the news industry is the network's *populist* mode of address. In this dissertation, I assert that the rhetorical logic of populism is the linchpin of Fox News's

overarching meaning structure and branding strategy. This is clearly the case with Fox News's top three programs—*Glenn Beck*, *Hannity*, and *The O'Reilly Factor*. And I demonstrate the power of this approach by showing how these programs spun news about the Great Recession to fashion a conservative economic agenda.³

From the beginning, Fox News's key actors have marketed the network using populist rhetoric distinguishing "the people" from "elites." For example, Fox News's first star anchor and the network's current number one host, Bill O'Reilly wrote in a 2001 bestselling book that, "journalists in all media should go back to working-class sensibilities and values" (O'Reilly, 2001) and in the year prior told the *Washington Post* that his show on Fox News is, "the only show from a working-class point of view."⁴ CEO Roger Ailes, often credited as the creative master mind behind Fox News's unique style, explained Fox News's appeal by how it was different from the mainstream media telling *Newsweek* in a 2001 interview, "The media elite think they're smarter than the rest of those stupid bastards, and they'll tell you what to think. To a working-class guy, that's bulls—t" (Wolcott, 2001, para. 4). Echoing similar themes, in a 2004 interview Rupert Murdoch, owner of Fox News and News Corporation, Fox's parent company, assessed the US media and Fox News's place in it by stating, "The traditional media in this country is in tune with the elite, not the people...That is why we're not liked by the traditional media. That's not us" (Strupp, 2004, para. 2). One finds that same use of anti-elitist rhetoric and attendant claim to represent "ordinary Americans" expressed in the above quotes, in Fox News's programming and marketing discourse and the network's self-

³ Later in this introduction I discuss my method of analysis and my reasoning for selecting the pool of programming content covered in this study. However, for a full explanation of my methodology and program selection see Appendix One and Two.

⁴ Farhi, Paul. (2000, December 13). The Life of O'Reilly." *Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A62722-2000Dec12?language=printer>.

narrative. I argue that the best way to make sense of Fox News's claim to be more "in tune" "with the people" is through the theoretical tools of populist political theory and through the history of populist rhetorical traditions in the United States.

Populist rhetoric contrasting 'elites' with 'everyday Americans,' or 'fat cats' with 'underdogs' may speak to differences in status and power relations, but the distinctions have not always referred to material differences. For centuries American politicians have used the language of populism to talk about class and to mobilize class resentments. During the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was the political left who was most effective at deploying the populist style. But during the Great Recession, the conservative movement used populist rhetorical frames on Fox News to change the political significance of anti-elitist rhetoric.

Too often critics of Fox News treat the network's populist mode of address as a gimmicky type of charlatanism that is used to convey simple and misleading news stories. But in fact, Fox News's populist journalistic style is a sophisticated and complex form of political communication.⁵ Populism is hard to control because it refuses authority. It requires great performative skill to embody, too, because populist voices and speakers are meant to resemble "ordinary" people and exude emotion and sincerity. Using it well requires both deep knowledge of traditional political discourses, and an astute awareness of the key social and cultural cleavages active in a given historical moment. In a sense, a successful piece of populist political media is kind of like a hit pop song. Its outward simplicity is deceptive, suggesting to many music critics that they

⁵ In his article "A Structural Hermeneutics of *The O'Reilly Factor*" (2011), Matthew Norton refers to this quality as the "simplicity-complexity dynamic" of *The O'Reilly Factor*. Norton stresses that one should not mistake the simplicity of the final news interpretations *The Factor* arrives at with the array of representational techniques and rhetorical framing devices the program uses to produce such interpretations.

could easily make a hit pop song, too, when tapping popular tastes is in fact subtle and difficult.

In this dissertation, I deconstruct the performance of Fox News hosts in these terms. I illustrate how the hosts celebrate the knowledge gained from lived experience, interpersonal relationships and popular culture, while taking antagonistic stances toward expert knowledge and educational credentials. The hosts also tend to be emotionally expressive and openly moralistic, often asserting moral discourses over facts to support political claims.⁶ I argue that it is by using these representational strategies, Fox News's top programs are able to express and frame their political and ideological messages as being aligned with the views of the authentic, national majority or, using former Alaska governor and Fox News contributor Sarah Palin's phrase, "the real Americans." By claiming to fight for 'the American people' and 'look out for the folks,' the narrowness of the conservative agenda that Fox News's serves can be presented as a much broader social and moral interest and, in turn, the partial and particular quality of modern conservative economic ideas can be discussed as a universally shared set of ideas that resembles "common sense" as opposed to political dogma.⁷

The 2008 financial collapse and the subsequent Recession caused profound devastation that inflicted economic pain that spanned across the U.S. population and globally. The 'Great Recession' also posed arguably the greatest threat to free market ideology and conservative politics since the Great Depression in 1930s. So, it also

⁶ This is not to suggest that anchors performing a traditional, professional style of journalism do not make normative assumptions or convey moral values. It is to say that when they do it is done covertly. This is because the primary discourses of justification professional journalists tend to rely on are discourses of scientific empiricism and journalistic neutrality, discourses whose very criteria of legitimacy and truth are based on the production and display of value-free judgments.

⁷ Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci describes this as the process by which a 'corporative class' becomes a 'hegemonic class' (1996) and Ernesto Laclau refers to this as making "sectorial demands" and grievances appear as 'universal' (2005, p. 98).

served as a test of strength of Fox's powers of political definition. The political and ideological stakes of determining how the public would interpret the crisis couldn't have been higher. In the immediate aftermath of the colossal market failure of 2008, and the widely acknowledged failure of the Bush presidency, it was the legitimacy of the conservative economic tenets (e.g. trickle down, deregulation, and privatization) that had predominated policy circles for the previous decades that were most vigorously questioned. The depth and scope of the economic crisis combined with the initial wave of public criticism conservative economic policies received in the fall of 2008 helped pave the way for Democratic political victory with the election of Barack Obama as president.⁸

Yet, equally if not more important, it seemed after this victory that the Democrats had also won the contest of establishing their narrative of the Recession as the dominant one. In the fall of 2008, Democrats and the Obama campaign were successful in framing the economic crisis as the result of deregulation, wealth inequality, and the influence of big business over the political system. These rhetorical themes echoed the themes of 1930s politics and like the period after the Crash of 1929, in the wake of the crash of 2008, the hegemony of free market ideology was vulnerable and an alternative,

⁸ The threat to free market ideology was compounded by the political reality that the Democratic Party, the supposed alternative to conservative supply-side economics, assumed control of all three branches of government taking the majority of seats in both the House of Representatives and the Senate in 2006 and taking the Presidency in the 2008 with the election of Barack Obama. During the 2008 presidential campaign, a campaign that created unprecedented voter turnout and media coverage, conservative economic tenets were heavily criticized by then candidate Barack Obama and were framed as being the cause of the financial collapse and the general economic decline of the nation. Exit polls of the 2008 election clearly show that the economy was the top concern for voters and Obama consistently polled higher than his opponent Senator John McCain on the question of who would be a better steward of the economy. Obama's ability to win a substantial majority of the votes during the 2008 election partly reflects the fact that large portions of the American electorate including millions of white working-class voters and self-described independents had *initially* blamed the financial collapse and downturn on conservative economic policies and ideas. See CNN. (2008, November). *Election Center 2008*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#USP00p1>.

left-leaning economic philosophy seemed poised to replace it. Looking at the economic and political events of the fall of 2008, it is hard to imagine a greater test case for evaluating the resiliency and efficacy of conservative populist discourse than the case of how conservatives responded to the dilemma of the Great Recession.

Early 2009 was the most pivotal moment for Fox in its effort to gain conceptual control of the Recession. During the months of the January, February and March, the economy was experiencing record-breaking, high-water mark figures for job losses and foreclosures. This period was also the beginning of the administration of a charismatic, Democratic *and* African American president. Most importantly, it is when the 2009-2010 Federal budget was being proposed (February 2009), the second TARP bailout bill was passed (February 10) and the legislation for the government's largest, most consequential response to the crisis—the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) or the Stimulus Act—was being debated and passed through congress (January 16-February 17, 2009).

Possibly because Democrats were still high on their 2008 victory and because they held the reins of both branches congress and now the presidency, they seemed to underestimate the gravity of early 2009 and became complacent at the very time they needed to be the most vigilant about maintaining the reach, clarity, and resonance of their Recession narrative in the national media. Equally if not more important, in this moment it was crucial that president Obama and the Democrats asserted themselves as a anti-establishment political force. By channeling the ever growing popular discontent at the Wall Street bailouts and by elaborating and solidifying the leftist populist subject they gestured toward in the fall campaign, the Obama administration and Democrats *would've* had a popular thrust behind their progressive economic agenda (assuming they

had one). Instead, the Democratic leadership immediately assumed more of a cooperative and corporatist relationship to Wall Street and the healthcare industry (Taibbi, 2010; Suskind, 2011; Frank, 2012). Unlike president Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal government in 1933, after taking power in 2009 Democrats and the Obama administration did not assume a hostile posture to the financial sector or take it on in any significant way. By not doing so, the Democratic left deferred the role of populist political conduit and set the stage for another political vessel and brand of politics to capture the robust anger that had been created by the financial collapse and the resulting havoc it was causing in people's lives across the country.

Starting in mid-February and lasting through March, conservative street protests began to pop up in different locations across the country to oppose the Stimulus Act. With each day these protests were growing larger, more numerous and gaining more media coverage and national attention. Taking the name the "Tea Party," on April 15, 2009 (tax day), this movement hit its zenith and coordinated a truly nationwide protest consisting of hundreds of thousands of activists. Fox News played a significant role in the formation and growth of the Tea Party movement not only by openly promoting its message and events before any other news network, but by providing the fledgling movement with a national mouthpiece that could offer it a coherent narrative, ideology, and political agenda (Williamson and Skocpol, 2012, chapter 4). This alliance between Fox News and the Tea Party movement is historically unprecedented.⁹ Since the advent

⁹ In the introduction of his classic work on the mass media's coverage of anti-war movement in 1960s *The Whole World is Watching* (1980), journalism scholar Todd Gitlin makes the argument that for social movements to succeed they need to develop their own internal media systems (pp. 1-4). Historian Lawrence Goodwyn makes a similar point in his analysis of the Populist Party (1978, p. xix). This is so, Gitlin and Goodwyn both argue, they can publicly define themselves and not be "defined away" and deligitimated by an outside media system as was the case with the SDS's marginalization by the centralized news networks in the network era. In 1996, Fox

of television, no major social movement in the twentieth and twentieth-first century has had the full-throated backing of a national news corporation. For its part, the Tea Party movement drew more attention to the post-election, anti-stimulus narrative Fox News had already begun formulating before the movement had emerged. In addition, the mobilization of the Tea Party movement—the *organizational*, “in the streets” populism it stood for—gave Fox News’s *representational* populism greater substance and meaning.¹⁰ Since the Tea Party emerged three years ago, a significant amount of

News entered the scene of television news and became the first news channel to assertively use political identity as a strategy of product and market differentiation (Curtin and Shattuc, 2009). As the network’s commercial success and political influence grew, the Fox News Channel has in many aspects replaced the Republican Party as the primary mouthpiece of the conservative base (Frum, 2010). Thus, when the first Tea Party protests emerged in 2009, it is unsurprising that Fox News played an active role in promoting and greatly amplifying the visibility of the TPM. What needs to be recognized and noted is the historical precedence that this set. Fox News’s collaboration with the Tea Party movement marks the first time in American history where a national television news corporation acted in unison with a street protest movement as opposed to marginalizing it.

And already Fox News’s partisan marketing strategy and supportive, activist involvement with a street protest movement has been emulated by another television news network. Noting Fox News’s commercial success, starting in the early 2000s MSNBC increasingly adopted more of a partisan branding and programming strategy and to date stands as one of the few major television news outlets to assume a liberal advocacy position. While this position is slightly more tempered than Fox News’s more aggressive partisanship, MSNBC, like Fox News with Tea Party, has supported and promoted left-leaning street protest movements that have emerged in the last year, namely, the Wisconsin labor rights protests and the Occupy Wall Street protests. One of MSNBC’s top programs *The Ed Show*, repeatedly aired broadcasts from protest sites during the OWS and Wisconsin events and continues to conduct broadcasts from political events related to labor unions. The practice of television news networks broadcasting in an activist posture from protest sites demonstrate new forms of television journalism and new, more symbiotic relationships between corporate marketing strategies and social-democratic political mobilization that warrants more critical inquiry.

¹⁰ Political theorist Francisco Panizza (2005) maintains there is a difference between organizational and representational modes of populism, which he describes as the difference between “populism in the streets” and “populism in power.” *Organizational populism* involves the grassroots political mobilization of mass and/or non-elite segments of a given population. As Panizza explains, *representational* populism describes the way political elites use populist representational styles to make appeals—through major institutions of public opinion—to sections of the popular masses. *Representational populism* always includes an appeal to the people and the social underdogs but they do not always entail actual popular-democratic activity and grassroots involvement in the political project or political organization using populist modes of representation. While populist modes of representation are usually connected to some form of

research has already been produced on the movement. However, what has only been superficially engaged is the content and quality of arguably the most important discursive fonts that the movement drew upon in its development: Fox News programming.

Within a relatively short period of time, the national debate over the recession had shifted from one about wealth inequality, corporate malfeasance, and financial sector recklessness to essentially a fiscal debate about the national debt, taxpayer victimization, and the “sweet heart” benefits of public-sector workers and public-sector unions. This shift would dramatically culminate and be capped off by the 2010 midterm elections, an election characterized by the conspicuous lack of Democratic and Independent turn out and by a Republican “tsunami” (as it was overly referred to) that took more congressional seats than in any midterm since 1938 (Tomasky, 2010; Storey, 2010). The historic defeats Democrats suffered in the 2010 midterms effectively ensured that, at the level of policy and legislation, the progressive agenda was dead in its tracks. Taking a longer view, this meant that progressives would not take advantage of the once in a generation political opportunity that was presented by the Great Recession. Instead, the progressive agenda would be rolled back further as accentuated by president Obama’s signing of a bill to extend the Bush era tax cuts for the top-income earners on December 17, 2010.

In the fall of 2008, few, including myself, would have predicted such as political reversal. Shouldn’t an extreme case of market failure like the Great Recession incite mass anti-corporate sentiments and, from this, catapult progressive economic reforms? In his early writings on Thatcherism, cultural theorist Stuart Hall disabuses this notion

popular political involvement, i.e. populist organizational modes, the quality and degree of this involvement varies significantly in each historical and national context.

and stresses that economic recessions do not automatically unfurl particular politics and interpretations of the crisis's conditions (as orthodox Marxist analyses lead one to assume). Hall asserts that how a crisis is going to be resolved is contingent on what representational work is done in what he calls "the theatre of political and ideological struggle" (1988, p. 45). In the political culture of the United States, television stands as the primary form of political communication and is no doubt one of the most predominant "theatres" where political-ideological struggle takes place. Even though the Internet is gaining on television especially among younger citizens, television still stands as the most frequent source of news for most Americans (Baum 2003; Bennet 2005; Graber 2002) and has been the main source citizens refer to when developing their political views (Iyengar, 1987). And within this televisual-political terrain, cable news stands out. Even though broadcast networks still have larger audiences than cable news, recent studies have shown that cable news has surpassed broadcast network news as the number one source for political information (Blumenthal 2010; Huffingtonpost 2012; Pew Research Center 2007).¹¹ Furthermore, the political influence of cable news outweighs

Compared to broadcast television news, the cable news audience is much smaller. As one private marketing research study shows 37.4% of respondents said that their primary source of news is broadcast television, while only 10.2% reported cable television as their primary source: TVB. (2012) *TV Basics: A Report on the Growth and Scope of Television*. Retrieved from http://www.tvb.org/media/file/TV_Basics.pdf. However, when one compares the ratings of Fox News's top programs to the top news programs of broadcast networks like CBS, ABC, NBC individually, one finds that their ratings are far more comparable and sometimes Fox News programs surpass the ratings of these programs. For example, *The O'Reilly Factor* with Bill O'Reilly surpassed NBC's *Rock Center with Brian Williamson* four times this year. Gorman, B. (2012, March). Cable Beats Broadcast Round 4: 'Rock Center with Brian Williamson' Viewership Below 'the O'Reilly Factor' Again." *TV by the Numbers*. Retrieved from <http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2012/03/30/cable-beats-broadcast-round-4-rock-center-with-brian-Williamson-viewership-below-the-oreilly-factor-again/126769/>. However, beyond the issue of ratings, in the last several years multiple studies have shown that cable news consistently ranks higher than network news as the most important source of political information. Blumenthal, M. (2010, May). Reliance on Cable News: More Than We Thought? *Huffingtonpost*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-blumenthal/reliance_on_cable_news_more_th_b_727639.html?ref=email_share. (2012,

its audience size by the lopsided amount of attention it garners from political elites and the journalism community and for its ability to drive the entire agenda of the national media. This agenda setting capacity has been especially documented with Fox News, the dominant cable news network (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008; Dreier and Martin, 2010; Skocpol and Williamson, 2012)

Since topping CNN in 2002, Fox News has remained the number one cable news network and currently achieves higher ratings than MSNBC and CNN combined (Holcomb et al, 2012, "cable" section). Some critics dismiss Fox News's ratings success by pointing out how the median age of the Fox News viewer is 62 and that the network is only watched by Republicans. What they fail to mention is that Fox News regularly outperforms its cable news competitors in the key 25-54 age demographic as well. In addition, a 2010 Pew study showed that 21% of Fox News' audience identifies as Democrat. This means that, due to Fox News' massive audience size, a comparable numerical amount of Democrats watch Fox News as CNN and MSNBC.¹²

Most importantly, during the critical year of 2009, Fox News posted its highest annual ratings in the network's sixteen-year history and in this period the network made its greatest gains in the desirable 25-54 demographic, this, while CNN and MSNBC's ratings declined.¹³ A content analysis conducted by a Pew study titled "Covering the Great Recession: How the Media Have Depicted the Economic Crisis During Obama's

February). Cable News Main Source for 2012 Presidential Campaign Viewers." The Pew Research Center: For the People and the Press. (2007) *What Americans Know: 1989-2007: Public Knowledge of Current Affairs Little Changed by News and Information Revolutions*. Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/319.pdf>.

¹² Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. (2010). *Americans Spending More Time Following the News Ideological News Sources: Who Watches and Why*. Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/2010/09/12/section-4-who-is-listening-watching-reading-and-why/>.

¹³ Shea, D. (2009, May) Fox News Claims Top 11 Cable News Programs in April, #2 in Cable. *Huffingtonpost* Retrieved http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/28/fox-news-claims-top-11-ca_n_192514.html.

Presidency”(2010), demonstrated that like the entire national news media (including major websites, print, broadcast news outlets), economic-related stories took up the greatest percentage of cable news programming during 2009. In addition, this study shows that in 2009 cable news mirrored the trends in the national media in terms of what stories were covered the most frequently. The top three being, the second TARP bank bailout plan, the passing of the stimulus package, and the AIG bonus controversy. All three of these stories occurred in February and March of 2009. These months marked the greatest upsurges in economic coverage for the entire year in both cable and in the national media overall. Taking a closer look at Fox News’s ratings during 2009, one finds that in the first quarter of the year, during the very time the stimulus debate was in full swing and when the national media showed its greatest spike in economic coverage, Fox News posted its highest ratings spikes (measured by median viewership) in the network’s history. In this ratings quarter, Fox News rose to the second highest ranked cable channel in all of basic cable, only surpassed by USA, a strictly entertainment network.¹⁴

The correlation between Fox News’s record breaking ratings year and quarter

¹⁴ Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism. (2009) *Covering the Great Recession: How the Media Have Depicted the Economic Crisis During Obama’s Presidency*. Retrieved from http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/covering_great_recession. If one measures Fox News’s ratings performance during this period by *mean* as the Nielsen Media Research company prefers to do, the first three months of 2009 stand as Fox News’s third highest ratings quarter in the network’s history. Seidman, R. (2009, March). Fox News Celebrates Quarterly Success, Kicks Sand in CNN’s Face." *TV by the Numbers*. Retrieved from <http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2009/03/31/fox-news-celebrates-quarterly-success-kicks-sand-in-cnns-face/15669/>. However, if one measures this same quarter by *median* viewership as the Pew Research Center prefers to do, this period of time stands as the highest ratings performance Fox News has had in its entire history. In 2010, Fox News was the only cable news network to maintain its audience size, while its competitors (especially CNN) lost a significant amount of viewers in 2009 and 2010. See graph and ratings statistics given for 2009 and 2010 in the section titled “Cable: CNN Ends Its Ratings Slide, Fox Falls Again” in Holcomb et al (2012). *The State of the News Media 2012: An Annual Report on American Journalism*. Retrieved from <http://stateofthemediamedia.org/2012/cable-cnn-ends-its-ratings-slide-fox-falls-again/>.

and the shift in the Recession's narrative from an anti-corporate to an anti-government orientation in this same pivotal year and especially during the stimulus debate period does not—in a strictly scientific sense—provide a smoking gun that Fox News played a significant role in facilitating this shift. However, it is clear to me that during this period of programming Fox News had a significant impact on the political developments of the Recession era and was effective, in an ideological sense, at imposing its free market interpretation of the economic crisis. I base this assertion off three facts that are born out by the quantitative studies I have cited and by the political history of the period, 1) during the Recession period Fox News was one of greatest single sources of political information in the United States, 2) during this period Fox News enjoyed an unprecedented expansion of its audience, and 3) Fox News's anti-government interpretation of the same key events that were covered by the entire national news media emerged as the dominant interpretation in the media ecosystem and mirrored the anti-government, fiscal-centric direction the majority of the national media moved toward by the end of 2009.

Fox News's coverage of the Great Recession offers an exceptional case when the network's populist representational strategy seemed most effective at serving the conservative political project and I chose to analyze Fox News's coverage of the Great Recession because this period of time marks both a clear crisis of legitimacy for Fox News's free market ideology and a moment when network's free market agenda rebounded and thrived thereafter. The primary range of Fox News texts that this study examines starts from Fox News's coverage of the financial collapse in September of 2008 (i.e. the beginning of the ideological dilemma) to the end of 2010 (i.e. its political resolution). The popular resonance that Fox News's coverage had during this period is

indicated by Fox News recording breaking ratings in 2009 and by the fact that Fox News was the only cable news network to sustain the size of its audience in 2010 when its competitors' ratings were declining (and in the case of CNN, declining dramatically).

Within this primary range, this study devotes the majority of its analysis to a secondary range of programming between late-January and April 2009. I chose to zero in on this period of programming for four reasons, 1) it takes place at a pivotal political moment of the Recession, when the most consequential policy responses to the crisis were being crafted and passed, 2) it represents a historic ratings spike for Fox News, 3) it is a time when the Fox News's topics of coverage and analysis were similar to the rest of the national media, thus, providing an example of moment when Fox News's framing and narratives directly competed with centrist and pro-stimulus narratives, and lastly, 4) it takes place during the build up and on the eve of the April 15 national Tea party protest.¹⁵

Let me now explain the significance of these two programming ranges to the dissertation's chapter order. I see the discourse of cultural populism and the themes of ordinariness and cultural elitism as being the *deep* meaning structure of Fox News's representational system. These themes have been associated with the network's brand

¹⁵ One may note that I added the month of April to my secondary range of analysis. April is outside the first quarter Nielson ratings measurement that I have been citing. In addition, the Pew study I cited earlier shows that after March of 2009, the percentage of economic-related stories covered by cable and the national media overall declined in April. I chose to add the month of April to the secondary range, one) because Fox News's sustained its record high ratings levels in the month of April, and 2) because my study considers the Tea Party events of April as Recession-related events that were heavily covered by the entire national media. The Pew study on the Recession coverage did not consider the April 15th Tea Party protest as a Recession-related story in their content analysis even though the Tea Party movement primarily had, in April at least, a political economic message and critique that was explicitly a protest against the bailouts and the stimulus bill, the topics that dominated the news media in the prior months. Content analyses that have examined the news coverage the Tea Party protest received in April demonstrate that indeed the Tea Party was one of the most cited stories on Fox News, CNN and the national news media overall (Skocpol 2012, pp. 130-138).

even before the network was launched, when it was being conceptualized by owner Rupert Murdoch and CEO Roger Ailes (Collins, 2003; Pierce, 2002; Wolcott, 2001; McKnight, 2012). Because the general populist representational structure, cultural populist themes and the attendant popular intellectual analytical disposition are foundational components of Fox News's mode of address, this dissertation begins by demonstrating these elements in chapter one and chapter two. As well, because these elements are more long standing and less prone to change due to current events, in chapter one and two I stay within the primary range of programming (late-2008-2010), that is, a looser, more expansive period of time. However, to evaluate how Fox News's deploys its populist address to interpret a particular event, in chapter three, four, and five I examine how Fox News's covered and interpreted Recession and to do this I mostly stay within the secondary range of programming (late-January to April), the period of the stimulus debate and Tea Party protest.¹⁶

So what exactly did Fox News say about the economic crisis and what were the special ways it modified its populist mode of address to account for the special conditions of the Great Recession?

In its attempt to rehabilitate free market ideology and shift public attention away from corporate greed and recklessness to government spending and taxation, the coverage of the Fox News's top programs exhibited two noteworthy interpretative

¹⁶ The caveat to this is that, while chapter four and five entirely stay within the secondary range, in chapter three on occasion I use examples outside this date range. This is because in chapter three, I layout Fox News's broader narrative of the Recession from the collapse in September of 2008 to the mid term elections at the end of the 2010 and this sets up the following two chapters on Fox News's Recession coverage, which are more pointed. The centerpiece examples in chapter three are primarily taken from early-to-mid 2009, the secondary range. However, in order to show how the discourses that Fox News's top shows used to frame of the Recession have a broader arc and that they didn't emerge out of nowhere, I use quotes and examples taken from episodes in late 2009 and a few in 2010 to demonstrate. Many of these examples that lie outside the secondary range repeat and follow examples that are taken from the secondary range.

strategies. These strategies were not produced from scratch but rather were components that had already been part of Fox News's representational system. However, due to their special compatibility with the conditions of the Recession, these strategies were brought to fore in Fox News programming during the downturn. In chapter three, "Job Creators, Crony Capitalists, and Subprime Parasites: Framing the Great Recession through the Moral Discourse of Producerism," I demonstrate the most crucial aspect of how Fox News's top programs covered the Great Recession, which is how they emphasized the moral stakes of handling the crisis and invested their energy in determining how they would be defined (see closing section for remaining chapter summaries). While proponents of the Stimulus bill and the Obama administration asserted cost-benefit arguments about the *content* of the bill's policies and what its appropriate size should be, Fox News programming repeatedly questioned the *moral premise* of government assistance and the very *idea* of government intervention itself.¹⁷ One key component of this strategy involved framing the stimulus act and subsequent democratic policies within a moral narrative of theft. Not only did this theft narrative work to transform the stimulus debate into moral issue, it provided a justification for Fox News hosts and pundits to approach recession-related stories using the populist rhetorical address and an antagonistic mode of analysis that is so crucial to both the network's brand identity and, on a political level, to mobilizing popular discontent.

The entire repertoire of moral discourses conservative political figures use is

¹⁷ Stuart Hall's analysis of the populist rhetorical strategies that the Thatcher administration utilized in the United Kingdom during the recession plagued period of the late-1970s offers an apt historical precursor to Fox News's populist framing of the Great Recession. In order to ward off privatization and other neoliberal policies, the British left, Hall shows, committed its political energy to defending the technical efficacy of labor and welfare policies. However, they were defeated by the Thatcher coalition partly because, Hall suggests, Thatcherism invested its efforts on formulating a moral argument against welfare and attacking it as a *concept* (Hall, 1988, p. 47; Jameson 1991, p. 263).

often referred to in Fox News programming with the umbrella term “traditional values.” What the phrase traditional values means and which moral discourses in the conservative repertoire Fox News’s top hosts emphasize has been contingent on the historical context. For example, during the Clinton scandal in the late-1990s and during the 2000s in the W. Bush era, “family values” and religious “culture war” discourses were foregrounded in Fox News programming. However, during the Great Recession and Obama era, the moralistic approach Fox News’s hosts assumed in their analysis of the economic crisis relied on an old strain populist discourse called *producerism*. Like all populist discourses, producerist discourse dichotomizes society into two opposing camps. In the case of producerism, these camps are characterized as the “producers” and “parasites,” or using terminology heard in Fox News programming, “the makers and the takers.” Whether accented as right-wing or left-wing, the central principle underlying producerist populism is the notion that value and wealth are created through labor and, thus, a *moral* economy should be structured to serve those defined as the producers. It is from this traditional discourse that Fox News’s draws its narrative of theft about an idle, parasitic class that expropriates the wealth of the virtuous producers. In projecting notions about whose toil and skill creates wealth, who steals or destroys wealth, and what a fair and merited distribution of wealth is, producerist discourse was useful for Fox News’s interpretation of the Recession because it offered Fox’s top hosts a way to translate free market theory into a “ethic” or set of moral obligations.¹⁸

In the wake of the 2008 financial collapse and especially during the stimulus

¹⁸ Stuart Hall makes a similar argument about Thatcherite populism but Hall does not recognize the centrality of producerist discourse to the moral translation of free market ideology. Instead, Hall maintains that the key traditional discourses the Thatcher administration utilized came from the tradition of Toryism, a traditional discourse that has producerist themes in it but ones Hall chooses not to focus on. Instead, Hall stresses the themes of nation, family, authority, and duty (1988, p. 47).

debate of early 2009, Fox News pundits deployed producerist discourse to maintain that it was the economic tinkering of government bureaucrats combined with the parasitism of a bloated public sector that caused the Great Recession. Fashioning an anti-government, pro-business brand of producerist discourse that I call *entrepreneurial producerism*, Fox News programming framed the fundamental economic antagonism of the Great Recession as being one between public sector and private sector workers as opposed to between workers and big business like in the Great Depression era. Fox News's anti-statist version of producerism not only framed the interests of the business-class as equivalent to the "private" working-class, it affirmed that all private sector actors—in having a common work ethic and "productiveness"—share a moral and cultural likeness.

In chapter four and chapter five, I analyze the second Recession-related interpretive strategy that Fox News's programming employed. During the stimulus debate and the Tea Party protest, one finds an increased usage of historical referents and historical analysis in Fox News programming. Particularly, Fox News's top shows invoked the history of the Great Depression as way to make their free market interpretation of the contemporary economic crisis. In early 2009, Fox News's top shows devoted a series of programs to the history of the Great Depression and frequently made the argument that Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal prolonged the Depression and, therefore, Obama's stimulus bill, predicated on the same government-spending approach, will hinder the recovery of the contemporary recession. The choice of Fox News's top shows to take on this history and use it as way to bolster its argument for a free market, hands off approach to the current crisis was surprising. Conventionally, the history of Depression recalls a moment of victory for the Democratic Party and the Labor

movement and remembers president Franklin Roosevelt as a hero, big business as a villain, the New Deal as a success and laissez faire economics as a failure. For these reasons, the memory of the Depression has—for decades—validated liberal economic arguments for expanding government programs, increasing taxes on the rich, and regulating business and finance. However, Fox News's top programs were undeterred by the prevailing left-leaning history of the Depression and strove to rewrite it by using a sophisticated interpretative strategy that engaged the history of the Depression on two levels, at the level of "collective memory" (the subject of chapter four) and at the level of professional history and academic knowledge (the subject of chapter five).

Literature Review

Much of the scholarship on Fox News, both popular and academic, hinges on one main question: does Fox News serve the conservative agenda? Some have answered this question by demonstrating how Fox News affects voting behavior (Della Vigna, 2006) and the attitudes of its audience (Morris, 2005). Others, mostly popular works, have demonstrated the conservative bias of Fox News programming (Brock 2004, Brock and Rabin-Havt 2012; Kitty and Greenwald, 2005; Alterman, 2004; Conway et al, 2007; Morris, 2005). While these studies raise important questions that warrant more critical attention (e.g. to what extent does Fox News affect voting and audience attitudes, how biased is Fox News), I think in general it is safe to say that Fox News does in fact serve the conservative agenda and does so effectively and significantly. Tellingly, conservative media critics and politicians themselves—though they downplay the network's political intentionality and the degree of its bias—acknowledge that Fox News "tilts" conservative. Even Fox News's number one host, Bill O'Reilly, has admitted

this.¹⁹ The question that is not asked enough, however, is *how* does Fox News programming, at the textual level, advance conservative ideology?

Considering the presence Fox News has in our political culture, surprisingly there have only been a handful of peer reviewed textual/content analyses of the network's programming. The most well-known and cited reference is Mike Conway, Maria Grabe and Kevin Grieves' (2007) content analysis of *The O'Reilly Factor* titled "Villains, Victims and the Virtuous in Bill O'Reilly's "No-Spin Zone"". To understand how *The O'Reilly Factor*, Fox's top show, conveys political messages and produces meaning, these journalism scholars turn to a propaganda interpretative model that was developed by the Institute for Propaganda Analysis in 1937. This model was designed by early mass communication scholars to interpret popular radio programs of the day, namely, the program of the notorious radio host Father Charles Coughlin. This study is useful because, by using quantitative methods, it is able to identify recurring rhetorical trends and frequently cited reference groups. This offers subsequent studies helpful orientation points for doing more in depth textual analysis. For example, their study demonstrates that the media and academics are two of the most heavily referenced political entities and groups and are regularly framed in a negative light. From this, one can, as I do in this dissertation, begin to explore how Fox News elaborates and builds narratives around these frequently cited identity groups (p. 208).

However, the authors' quantitative, propaganda model of analysis depicts the identity groups referenced on O'Reilly as one-dimensional figures and therefore overlooks the vital way in which O'Reilly's program gives these reference groups a

¹⁹ Media Matters for America. (2004, July). O'Reilly: 'Fox Does Tilt Right': Said GOP 'Very Uneasy with Fox' Even Adter Cheney, Ralph Reed Touted Fox. Retrieved from <http://mediamatters.org/research/200407210007>.

cultural texture and social location and how, through them, tacit theories of power are expressed. In reading O'Reilly's moral framing through equally abstract and simplistic binaries (e.g. "good/bad," "scary/safe"), Conway et al's analysis also misses how O'Reilly's moral rhetoric conveys rationales and logics that are elaborate, complex and deeply historical.

In my analysis, I use a genealogical method to understand the historical origins and political trajectories of the rhetorical strategies Fox News relies on to frame contemporary events. I will explain the benefit of this genealogical method shortly. Moreover, I utilize a semiotic interpretative model because it allows me to examine the ways in which—in addition to verbal rhetoric—the historical political discourses Fox News deploys are expressed in and reinforced by presentational aesthetics, visual imagery, analytical dispositions and embodied performances.²⁰ Conway et al's primarily verbal-rhetorical analysis does not account for these communicative components and therefore misses some of the most important signifying registers Fox News programming uses to make political identifications. Overall, because of the interpretive tools Conway et al utilize, they do not capture the multiple dimensions of *The O'Reilly Factor's* and how these dimensions are integrated into a comprehensive representational system and, therefore, their study falls short in explicating how *The Factor* produces meaning and effectively asserts resonant political interpretations.

The hermeneutic tools Conway et al's selected is partly a product of the propaganda model of persuasion their whole analysis is premised on. For these authors, *The O'Reilly Factor* is a persuasive program because it plays on the primal fears of the audience by creating and reading political news through a demonology and

²⁰ In appendix one, I offer a more complete explanation of my hermeneutic model and methods.

good guy/bad guy vision of the world. Starting with this assumption, analyzing *The O'Reilly Factor* becomes an endeavor of identifying rhetorical devices such as “naming calling” or “glittering generalities” that reduce political opponents to crude negative stereotypes. Indeed, the rhetorical tricks Conway et al outline in their study are present in *The O'Reilly Factor*, however, these rhetorical devices are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the programs overall meaning system and represent some of the most simplistic communicative components of the program’s political messaging. By interpreting *The Factor* through this fear and obfuscation framework, Conway et al’s analysis does not adequately engage the question how *The O'Reilly Factor* speaks to the audience’s values, presents compelling points of identification, and represents a social and cultural world the audience recognizes as their own.

Like Conway et al, my study is grounded on a persuasion model of analysis. However, rather than propaganda, my conceptualization of how Fox News “persuades” is informed by hegemony theory and looks to the cultural history of the discourses Fox News deploys to explain the network’s political force. I use a method of discourse analysis to understand and explain Fox News’s style of political communication and this differs from most of the mass communication and political science studies that have analyzed Fox News’s programming.

There have been two peer review articles that have conducted a closer, more critical textual reading on Fox News programming. In his article “A Structural Hermeneutics of *The O'Reilly Factor*” (2011), sociologist Matthew Norton uses a structural hermeneutic interpretive framework to demonstrate what he calls the “simplicity-complexity” dynamic of *The O'Reilly Factor*. In line with Norton, my analysis demonstrates how Fox News’s top programs involve a plethora of representational

components and techniques that elaborate the program's meaning system on one hand and a basic rhetorical structure that condenses and radically simplifies its messaging on the other. However, because we conceptualize Fox News's basic meaning structure differently—Norton claiming it is underpinned by a sacred/profane binary, me claiming it is built on a populist logic—we notice different representational techniques in O'Reilly's program. Moreover, with the representational components we both recognize, we tend to interpret the functionality of these components differently. For example, I, like Norton, stress the importance of the Fox News's host's "persona" in the operation of the overall meaning system but, in this instance, our analyses differ in that he does not offer a theory of class to describe and explain how and why this persona is politically meaningful.

Another key article on Fox News that I turn to in this dissertation is media studies scholar Chris Peters' article "No-Spin Zone: The Rise of the American Cable News Magazine" (2009). Peters' analysis does an excellent job at theorizing and demonstrating the performative aspect of *The O'Reilly Factor* and particularly notes the importance of O'Reilly's performance of an unconventional analytical approach, which he calls the "involved news anchor." Peters' conception of "involved" journalistic stance and his analysis of the use of lay epistemological standards shares a significant resemblance with what I call the "invested disposition" of the "popular intellect." However, as I will discuss in further detail in chapter two, Peters' analysis primarily approaches this "involved" stance and use of "common sense" as a argumentative device and debating tactic whereas my analysis emphasizes how it functions as constitutive part of the host's performance of a working-class cultural disposition, which, in turn, advances the network's broader populist representational strategy.

In raising the level of analytical sophistication and in taking an approach that seeks to learn from Fox News programming as opposed to merely calling out its failings and devices of deception, these two articles make important interventions in the small but growing literature on Fox News programming. However, like the other works mentioned above, these two works share similar shortcomings. While both these works offer a more comprehensive description of *The Factor's* meaning system, they do not provide specific examples of how this meaning system is deployed for political purposes. They break down how the semiotic machine works but do not show or explain what it is used for. In short, they do not offer an adequate political analysis and by not sufficiently engaging the political component of Fox News programming, how it advances a particular political-ideological project, they overlook a foundational piece of its representational system. Secondly, even though they both offer helpful historical contextualizations of cable news and journalism, in terms of political history, they both represent *The O'Reilly Factor's* system of political symbols and identity references as a self-contained unit. Because Norton and Peters do not situate their analysis of *The O'Reilly Factor* and Fox News within the history of American political culture as I do, they fail to include key components of the program such as its taste and class politics as well as its key moral discourses and narratives. With the components they do recognize, they overlook how the thematic structures, archetypes, and discourses they identify in the program such as 'the elites' and 'the folks,' which they both reference, specifically build off of and gain their power from the populist representational strategy of the postwar conservative movement and the broader populist rhetorical tradition of the United States.

Fox Hegemony: Negotiating Political Interests with Cultural Values

I attribute much of Fox News's success to how it departed from traditional models of broadcast journalism not only by introducing more partisanship, but also by breaking from the professional class aesthetic that had predominated television news up until Fox. However, by highlighting how Fox News's mode address is different from traditional television news, one may overlook its similarities with traditional television news and make the fruitless claim, as many critics have, that Fox News is not real news (Brock, 2004; Alterman, 2004; Kitty and Greenwald, 2005; Brock and Rabin-Havt, 2012). I would argue that if Fox News were so drastically different from traditional news than it probably wouldn't be as politically and commercially effective as it has been. While some find the idea that Fox News is journalism laughable, Fox News's top opinion programs interview major public officials, debate policy, and cover national events, all things one tends to associate with journalism. And while many in the journalism community question Fox News's legitimacy as a news organization, one must confront the reality that more Americans recognize Bill O'Reilly as a journalist than Bob Woodward or any other major journalist or news anchor for that matter.²¹

²¹ A 2005 Annenberg poll reported that 40 percent of Americans identified Bill O'Reilly as a journalist, in contrast to 30 percent that identified Watergate journalist Bob Woodward. Lester, W. (2005, June). "Many Americans Call O'Reilly a Journalist." *Associated Press*. A poll conducted by Public Policy Polling in 2010 showed that Fox News is the most trusted news channel in the United States, even over broadcast news networks. Several media critics and journalists have refuted the findings because conservative viewers tend to give Fox News an extremely high trust worthy rating, while liberals and independents give more moderate, balanced ratings for centrist and liberal networks. Critics of the poll also point out that Fox News ranked the highest amongst respondents as the most untrustworthy news channel. Poniewozik, J. (2010, January). Fox: The Most Trust Name in News." *Time*. Retrieved from <http://entertainment.time.com/2010/01/26/fox-the-most-trusted-name-in-news/>. Chris Peters notes how Fox's opinion shows repeatedly profess a commitment to many of the values of the objectivity regime such as journalistic independence, being a watchdog of power, fact-based reporting, empirical justification, and balance, which, from the network's perspective, is achieved by giving the "other side" their say. Thus, what this suggests is that the logic of professional journalism may not be the primary driver of Fox News programming, but it is still important.

This said, Fox News *is* different from other major news media corporations in the U.S. in crucial ways. In addition to its stylistic differences, a key difference between Fox News and other major news outlets is the exceptional degree to which the network is politically engaged. It is true what Fox News commentators say about the ‘mainstream media,’ that centrist and liberal journalists who pride themselves in their objectivity do in fact express political and ideological preferences in their reporting and commentary. The difference, however, between Fox News and its more professionally-minded competitors is that centrist journalists express ideological positions in the course of attempting to serve the a-political objectives of professionalism and commercialism. In contrast, Fox News engages in professional journalistic practices primarily to add legitimacy to the political and ideological agenda the network serves.

One key difference between Fox News and its competitors is that no other major news media organization has the same kind of sway over one of the nation’s major political parties than Fox News. In a 2010 interview with *Nightline*, former George W. Bush speech writer David Frum went as far as to suggest—as others have—that Fox News has supplanted the Republican Party as the primary political organ of the conservative movement. In a disparaging tone, Frum maintained that, “Republican originally thought that Fox News worked for us and now we’re discovering we work for Fox” (Schoestz, 2010, para. 1). Where the balance of power rests between Fox News and the Republican Party is debatable, what is less debatable is the symbiotic nature of the relationship between these two organizations and that fact that no major television news network has a comparable amount of influence over the Democratic Party.²²

²² I want to stress that I don’t think that Fox News’s partisan activist and advocacy journalistic stance disqualifies the network from the definition of news, after all, what the history of journalism

Fox News's parent company News Corporation has long had a Thatcher-Reagan free market ideological agenda. Yet, surprisingly the predominant view that has been expressed by critics, biographies and academic articles on News Corp. and its owner Rupert Murdoch is that Murdoch is driven primarily by profit and that he is only conservative to the degree that he is pro-business (Fallows, 2003; Gershon, 1997; Arsenault, 2008; Shawcross, 1992). In his article "Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation: A Media Institution with A Mission" (2010), David McKnight responds to this notion that Murdoch is primarily business-minded and non-ideological actor by saying bluntly that the claim is, "demonstrably false" (p. 304). Often, critics cite the centrist newspapers such as the London *Times* that Murdoch owns as proof of his business pragmatism. But, as McKnight points out, what is not mentioned is that, departing from the logic of a typical media corporation, many key newspapers Rupert Murdoch owns do not or have not ran a profit for quite some time (e.g. the London *Times*, *The Australian*, *The New York Post*) and his decision to consistently subsidize failing papers using profit from his successful outlets suggests a political rationale, not a corporate one.

Another thing critics cite to demonstrate that Murdoch is not driven by politics is Murdoch's support for Tony Blair and the Labor Party between 1997 through the 2000s. Yet, as McKnight argues, this analysis of Murdoch's politics overlooks is how Thatcherism shifted—with help from Murdoch's newspapers—the ideological terrain of

teaches us is that what is deemed 'unprofessional,' by today's 'official' journalists can often become what is adopted and considered standard practice by the professional journalists of tomorrow. Thus, while many in the news media see Fox News's broadcasting model as a degraded form of 'real' journalism, in retrospect, this model, for better or worse, might actually be the cutting edge of mainstream journalism. In addition, comparative studies of journalism demonstrate how definitions of journalism are contingent on the national context as well. For example, in the news environments of southern European countries, Fox News's partisan style would be seen as far more normative (Hallin, 2004). However, in the US and in the late-2000s, Fox News's political activist stance is, for now, not conventional.

British politics so far to the right that even the Labor Party's agenda was a neoliberal one. The Blair government, like the Clinton administration, represented a "Third way" brand of liberal politics that advanced conservative economic policies (as well as neoconservative foreign policy) and did so, in some ways, more effectively than Blair's partisan opponents who lacked the veil of moderation that Blair enjoyed. The support Murdoch and his news outlets have given to political parties has varied, but their loyalty to free market ideology has been remarkably consistent for decades.

McKnight not only makes the argument that Murdoch is politically motivated, but also maintains that Murdoch holds a particular view about what matters in politics, a view that places greater importance on ideological struggle than electoral competition.

McKnight writes, "the influence exercised by the news media of News Corporation is as much about setting a diffuse political and cultural agenda over the long term as it is about supporting (or opposing) a particular party or decision" (p. 304). To back this claim McKnight points to Murdoch's extensive involvement with free market think tanks in the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom and his decades long practice of providing conservative intellectuals popular platforms for their writing. At one such think tank in Sydney, Australia in 1994, Murdoch summarized the philosophy behind his political activism, ironically, by quoting John Maynard Keynes, the mid-twentieth century economist who pioneered the public works programs during the Depression. "We are all ruled by ideas," Murdoch declared. But for Murdoch, engaging in the war of ideas entailed ruling as much as creating. In addition to owning his extensive network of news outlets, he sat on the boards of major free market think tanks including the Hoover Institution in the U.S. (1987-88), the Institute for Public Affairs in Australia (1988-2000),

and the Cato Institute in the United States in 1997.²³ In the 1990s, Murdoch's *Sunday Times* and the *Institute of Economic Affairs* (IEA), the Thatcher's government core brain trust, co-published free market pamphlets promoting the scholarship of Charles Murray, an academic who wrote two prolific anti-welfare studies in *Losing Ground* (1984) and *The Bell Curve* (1996) (McKnight, 2010, p. 306).

In the U.S., Murdoch has used the *New York Post* as a platform for scholars at the vaunted Manhattan Institute in 2003 proclaiming on the heading that "ideas matter" and included writings from an edited volume published in observance of the institutes 25th anniversary (McKnight, 2010). In the Great Recession in 2009, the *Post* published a series of articles laying out the Manhattan Institute's supply-side policy recommendations for addressing the crisis. As I demonstrate in chapter five, Fox News, like the *Post*, served as a platform for conservative think tanks and intellectuals. I investigate the network's use think tank researchers at length in chapter five and foreground one key intellectual that appeared on Fox News in 2009, economic historian Amity Shlaes, a scholar who contributed an article to the Manhattan Institute's anniversary edited volume in 2003.

In light of Murdoch's political and ideological orientation, it is no coincidence he hired Roger Ailes as the president of Fox News in 1996 and with Ailes' history, one doesn't have to look nearly as deep to reveal the executive director's political orientation and drive. Prior to joining Fox News, Ailes worked as the media advisor for Republican presidents from Richard Nixon to Ronald Reagan to George H. Bush. Working for Nixon in the late-1960s, Ailes worked on the same political team as Kevin Phillips and Pat

²³ Cato Institute. (1997). "Murdoch Joins Board of Directors." *Cato Policy Report*. Retrieved from http://www.cato.org/pubs/policy_report/cpr-19n6-10.html.

Buchanan, two of the first political strategists to consciously devise a working-class populist strategy for the Republican Party that was based on cultural appeals and anti-elitist framing of the liberal opposition (themes senator Joseph McCarthy and Alabama governor George Wallace had already shown effective).²⁴

As a precursor to Fox News, from 1992-1996, Ailes was the executive producer of a television adaptation of the *Rush Limbaugh Show*, the most popular conservative talk radio program in the nation. The same year Limbaugh television show was cancelled, Ailes helped launch Fox News. A less well known but equally important part of Ailes' career history before Fox News is that Ailes served briefly as the news director for a short-lived conservative television news network in the early 1970s (Brock and Rabin-Havt, 2012, p. 28). In 1973, the same year that beer magnate Joseph Coors helped establish what would become one of the most powerful conservative think tanks in the US, the Heritage Foundation, Coors launched a news network called Television News Incorporated (TNI). Coors' vision of TNI and the Heritage Foundation were significantly inspired by former Nixon Supreme Court nominee Lewis Powell's now infamous "Powell Memorandum" which was addressed to the Chamber of Commerce and was enthusiastically received by key corporate leaders in the 1970s such as the

²⁴ Kevin Phillips lays out this strategy in his book *The Emerging Republican Majority* (1969). In the 1968 presidential campaign, Phillips advised Nixon to reach out to the Southern working-class by making cultural appeals, notably, through the country music industry (e.g. Nixon was the first American president to invite and have country singers to the White House and was the first to attend a show at the Grand Ole Opry)(Pecknold 2007, p. 218-219). Another part of this strategy was to appeal to white ethnic working-class communities in the Northeast and Midwest (e.g. Polish, Italian, Irish-American) by making specifically ethnic cultural appeals (Skrentny, 2008 p. 171-92). Most importantly, Phillips recognized the class politics and political benefits of taking an oppositional stance toward the educated elites, college students and journalists and this was reflective in Nixon and vice-president Spiro Agnew's political rhetoric at the time. As a speechwriter for Nixon, Pat Buchanan recognized and articulated similar themes and antagonisms and it was Buchanan who coined the term 'Silent Majority,' the key populist signifier of the New Right. In addition, it was Buchanan who wrote Agnew's famous critiques against the news networks foreshadowing Fox News's liberal media narrative (Kazin, 1998 p. 252).

CEO of Hewlett-Packard, of PepsiCo, and Standard Oil (Phillips-Stein 2011, p.163-169). Asserting an argument that conservative intellectuals of the day such as Irving Kristol and William Simon reiterated in their writings throughout the decade, the “Powell Memo” called upon conservatives and business leaders to move beyond an electoral-policy-based political strategy and invest greater energy in the construction of a conservative counter-intelligentsia and media establishment (Himmelstein 1990, p. 146, O’Connor 2007, pp. 73-75).

While the knowledge branch of the “Powell Memo” strategy came to fruition as the growth of free market think tanks exploded in the 1970s and 1980s, Television News Incorporated went under after only two years.²⁵ It wouldn’t be until talk radio revolution in the late 1980s and Fox News in the mid-1990s that the media branch of this strategy would be realized. All the same, Ailes’ experience working for Richard Nixon as a media consultant and for Joseph Coors as TNI’s news director in such a pivotal moment in the rise of the New Right no doubt informed Ailes’ conceptualization of Fox News when Murdoch handed him the task of designing its narrative and programming style.

What Murdoch and Ailes’ pre-Fox histories highlight are not only the nature of Fox News’s ideological agenda but also how Fox News’s success cannot be solely attributed to the network itself. Focusing too much on Murdoch’s business savvy, Ailes’ talent as a television producer or O’Reilly’s skill as a performer, leads one to overlook how Fox News, a conservative news outlet, took advantage of the favorable political and

²⁵ TNI failed because the network was unable to devise cost-effective ways to distribute and sell its news packages to local and national stations. Its distribution model was based on transmitting news packages across phone lines. In the early 1970s, the technology was not quite there to make this distribution method cost efficient and timely. AT&T charged local and national stations expensive rates to receive TNI’s news packages by this method and, as a result, these stations dropped TNI’s programming. For more on the history of Ailes and Television News Incorporated see (Brock and Rabin-Havt 2012, pp. 28-30).

cultural conditions that were put in place by decades and decades of ideological work done by the conservative movement. Since the postwar period, waves of conservative intellectuals and activists have over time honed and cultivated a repertoire of discourses and built up a media-knowledge infrastructure to transmit them. In doing so, the movement has provided subsequent generations of activists, intellectuals, and media producers with, using sociologist Chandra Mukerji's term, a "collective intelligence" about American politics (Mukerji, 2009). No single puppet master figure, institution or media organization created or controls the ideas associated with conservative populism but their gestalt produces a unifying power and thrust all the same.

However, understanding the history of conservative movement and the rise of the postwar conservative knowledge establishment only gives one a partial understanding of the collective political intelligence and discursive repertoire Fox News programming draws upon. A political history and analysis may explain what Stuart Hall calls the "aggressive themes" of Fox News programming discourse, that is, the supply-side economic interpretations and arguments that the network tirelessly puts forth. However, interest-based histories and analyses of Fox News like the one McKnight offers does not explain why these "aggressive themes" gain popular purchase and come to appear as common sense notions of what is right and what is good.²⁶ To adequately explain how

²⁶ However, to his credit, McKnight goes beyond a merely political analysis and does explore the stylistic and discursive qualities of Fox News and other Murdoch enterprises. In fact, McKnight's article stands as one of the few pieces of scholarship on News Corp. to recognize and take seriously what McKnight refers to as News Corp's "anti-elitist rhetoric." In addition, McKnight rightfully traces Fox News's brand populism to the postwar conservative movement's criticism of the "new class" and cultural elites in government, education, and the media. However, he does not develop this history, elaborate on its class politics and demonstrate it in the actual text or broadcast of News Corp. news outlets. Another shortcoming of McKnight's analysis of Fox News's brand of populism is that he primarily reads it through Thomas Frank's concept of Market Populism. While Frank's concept of Market Populism points to some prevalent themes one finds in conservative populist discourse, it overlooks the central modality of conservative populist

Fox News programming works as a political tool, one must supplement an interest-based theoretical approach with a cultural theoretical approach.²⁷ Writing about Thatcherism, Stuart Hall uses cultural analysis to demonstrate how the British right's free market interpretation of the late-1970s recession achieved its moral authority by touching on deep-seated cultural values and conceptions of 'the good' that have circulated in British popular culture for centuries. He calls these "organic themes" (1988, p. 47).

In the United States, one of the greatest repositories of organic themes about hierarchy, wealth and authority in the national popular culture is the populist rhetorical

discourse during the Great Recession: producerism. Frank developed his concept of Market Populism in his book *One Market Under God* (2000) by analyzing the political and cultural discourse of conservative politicians and business leaders during the 1990s, when the tech-boom and "new economy" discourse was at its height. In this period, Market Populist discourse was more ascendant. However, in the Great Recession era, discourses about producers and parasites, "job creators" and "fat cat" public sector employees, what I call entrepreneurial producerism discourse, was by far more prevalent than Market Populist discourse.

Centered on the notion that private consumption is a democratic action, Frank describes Market Populism as a discourse which asserts that the market parallels representative democracy and is in fact superior to it offering an unmatched ability to reflect and respond to popular wants, desires, and beliefs. As Frank outlines, the proponents of this discourse especially claim that this is the case with the advent of digital technologies and other new tools for gathering consumer information. My conception of entrepreneurial producerism differs from Frank's Market Populism in that producerism emphasizes production and labor as opposed to consumer agency and information. Nevertheless, entrepreneurial producerism shares Market Populism's tendency to represent the market as natural force and also projects the view that state interference in the market will hurt the economy by distorting its "natural order." In addition, like Market Populism, entrepreneurial producerism represents the market as a politically subversive or rebellious force and asserts the idea that a truly free, unregulated market naturally serves the interests of new money and start up businesses (or small businesses) and naturally challenges the privileged position old money and established industries (Frank, 2000).

²⁷ I take the terms "interest theory" and "cultural theory" from Michael Schudson's conceptualization of these theoretical approaches in his book *Watergate in American Memory* (1992). Schudson uses these concepts to describe different ways to analyze the construction and transmission of collective memory. Summarizing the differences between these two approaches, Schudson writes, "Interest guides memory to its own purposes, whether in the organized intentions of a totalitarian state or simply in the information control any powerful political figure may exercise over a public willing or wanting to believe—or even in the self-justifying ways of the ordinary person in everyday life. Apparently opposed to this "interest theory" of how we use the past is a "cultural" theory. If every society's symbols form a vast cultural system whose job is that of telling stories that represent and reproduce the existing society, then for good or ill, and whether or not it accords with our "interest," culture constrains how we tell the tale" (p. 53).

tradition (Kazin, 1998). Recognizing this, from the 1950s onward, conservative political leaders and activists increasingly started adopting populist frames, narrative structures and themes. Through colossal defeats (e.g. McCarthy's ruin in 1954, Barry Goldwater's landslide defeat in 1964) and colossal victories (e.g. the "Reagan Revolution" of 1980s), the conservative movement gradually forged an ideologically compatible version of the populist tradition that was and continues to be a highly compelling style of political representation. The series of choices the conservative movement has made overtime to emphasize particular organic themes in the populist rhetorical tradition that dovetail with free market ideology and occlude those that do not are present in Fox News's populist interpretation of the Great Recession.

This study utilizes a genealogical method of analysis to reveal the process of 'selective tradition' in the final interpretive product that Fox News creates in its populist framing of the economic crisis.²⁸ Not only does this kind of analysis allow one to identify the organic themes and deep cultural logics Fox News's Recession coverage plays on in using traditional populist discourses, it allows one to see how Fox News deals with and navigates the limits, contradictions, and risks that comes with using a populist representational strategy to advance free market ideology, risks that become more pronounced in the context of a historic market failure. "Culture," sociologist Michael Schudson reminds us, "constrains how we tell the tale" (1992, p. 53) and this is nowhere more true than with Fox News's attempt to narrate the Great Recession using populist rhetorical traditions.

Studies of conservative media such as Kathleen Jamieson and Joseph Cappella's book *Echo Chamber* (2008) tend to highlight what is easy about Fox News's

²⁸ I take the concept of 'selective tradition' from Raymond Williams. See (Williams, 1991).

political messaging, that is, how the network's political interpretations enjoy a receptive audience who willingly places themselves in the conservative media "echo chamber," a choir that wants to be preached to as opposed to one that wants to be intellectually challenged by alternative views.²⁹ In contrast, this dissertation seeks to highlight what challenges Fox News programming faces, how the free market interpretations that its top programs employ must confront and deal with existing beliefs, normative views, and the collective memory of the nation's past, all of which potentially, if not handled in an adroit and sophisticated manner, can endanger and contradict Fox News's political and ideological messages as opposed to buttress them.

²⁹ In their book *Echo Chamber* (2008), Kathleen Jamieson and Joseph Cappella argue that one of the main appeals of popular conservative political media such as Fox News is based on their ability to give their audience a feeling of cognitive harmony by asserting only those views that reinforce the audience's *preexisting* political beliefs. Jamieson and Cappella argue that this provides conservative audience members with an "echo chamber," a sort of media cocoon where their views are always affirmed and never fundamentally challenged. This argument has significant truth to it. It is logical that the great strides that were made by the postwar conservative movement that culminated in the "Reagan Revolution" would facilitate the formation of a sizable market for conservative news. Likewise, it is undeniable that today's national news audience is increasing fragmented and divided into partisan media enclaves as Jamieson and Cappella's study stresses. However, the echo chamber argument only explains so much in terms of Fox News's commercial success and political significance. For example, if the basis of Fox News's appeal is founded on its ability to preach to the partisan choir, how does one explain the fact that Fox News's audience quadrupled in less than ten years growing from 500,000 total viewers in 2000 to 2.5 million viewers in 2009 and why did it expand during the Recession? Allocca, K. (2009, December). 10 Year Chart of Cable News Ratings: Primetime." *Mediabistro*. Retrieved from <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/2418223/posts>. Furthermore, the echo chamber argument is limited in explaining why Fox News's anti-government framing of the Great Recession circulated beyond its echo chamber and effectively shaped national discourses. Conversely, it offers little explanation for why centrist media outlets who have larger audiences (e.g. broadcast news networks) and partisan liberal media outlets whose anti-poverty and anti-corporate discourses seemed more compatible to the conditions of the economic crisis didn't have equal or greater purchase. Lastly, how could news programming that simply towed the party line and fed viewers back their own political beliefs be engaging, watchable television? Considering that Fox News is the third highest rated network in all of basic cable ranking just under the non-news channels TNT and USA, there must be something more to Fox News's appeal than mere partisanship. Criticizing the echo chamber line of argumentation, Matthew Norton asks, "Would it be enough for a presenter to sit in front of a camera and read off a list of events and explain how they confirm the audience's political and social prejudices? It is hard to imagine three million people tuning in for this performance" (2009, p. 317). For work that asserts similar isolated exposure and media fragmentation arguments see (Tsfati and Cappella, 2003; Iyengar and Hahn, 2009; Morris, 2005; Frank, 2012).

In the network era, when only three channels existed, television producers had a veritable oligopoly and therefore, more or less a captive audience, i.e. a 1950s “echo chamber.” Yet, even with all the advantages that came with corporate consolidation and corporate liberal cooperation in government, television executives and advertisers could not, as American studies scholar George Lipsitz has emphasized, fabricate culture at will. Instead, to be commercially and ideologically successful, they always had to keep, as Lipsitz writes, “their eye in the organic artistry of everyday life in working class communities to find the fads, fashions, images, and ideas will strike a resonant chord with a mass audience” (1994, p. 270). Following Lipsitz’s insight about how cultural industries in the 1950s achieved ideological legitimacy, I argue that what makes Fox News programming such an impressive form of political communication is how keeps its eye on working-class taste and tells its stories using some of most deeply embedded structures of intelligibility there are in American political culture: producerism and cultural populism. By conducting a genealogy of these two key strains of populism, one does not have to rely on conspiracy theories to understand and explain the amazing coordination and uniformity of themes and discursive frames that appear across Fox News programming, across the conservative media-knowledge establishment and in the culture at large.

A Genealogy of Cultural Populism

At its most basic level, cultural populism is a type of political discourse that champions the common wisdom, taste, and intellectual capacities of ordinary people and denounces justifications for power based on claims to cultural superiority and unique

intellectual abilities and acquired knowledge.³⁰ This discourse has been part of American political culture for centuries. The cultural hierarchy of European culture as “high” and American culture as “low” was firmly established in colonial America and long after national independence was won, the ‘gentlemen’ class of the American politicians mostly reinforced this hierarchy and seldom challenged it (Levine, 1982). However, with the rise of Jacksonian politics in the nineteenth-century, presidents like Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln gained political appeal by exuding a cultural commonness, and especially in Jackson’s case, by castigating political opponents on the basis of their

³⁰ Similar to Jim McGuian’s use of the term in his book *Cultural Populism* (1992), I see the valorization of popular culture and common taste and a concomitant repudiation of elite or official culture as the core themes of cultural populism. In contrast to McGuian’s, however, I do not agree that cultural populism is mainly an intellectual preoccupation nor do I agree that the discourse has been primarily produced by the academic field of cultural studies. Looking at cultural populism in the context of twentieth-century and early twenty-first century American political culture, I emphasize how cultural populism has shaped and been produced by partisan politics, the postwar conservative movement, and attendant culture industries that have been politically and symbolically aligned over history with political conservatism such as country music, heartland themed television, tabloid news papers, talk radio, and cable news. I find McGuian’s definition of cultural populism as being any discourse that theoretically privileges or endows greater value to popular culture too indiscriminate to have a sufficient degree of analytical utility. Seeing cultural populism as McGuian conceptualizes it, prominent scholars of populism such Michael Kazin (1998) and Paul Taggart (2000) dismiss the political significance of the discourse and thus wrongfully exclude it from ‘American populist tradition.’

In one of the most definitive works on American populist rhetoric, *The Populist Persuasion* (1998), Kazin recognizes the presence of cultural populism in modern political culture calling it the “cultural mode” of populism. He claims that this brand emerged in the mid-1980s when the label ‘populist’ increasingly appeared in the textual fields of entertainment and advertising. Connotating different consumer appeals and taste-sets, in the late 20th century “populism,” he writes, “became something of a fashion statement” (p. 271). Whereas he argues the definition of populism that restricts the term to only mean the Populist Party of 1890s that some historians stubbornly hold on to is excessively specific, he holds that the cultural mode of populism is an overly licentious and is thus an equally inappropriate use of the term. Cultural populism, he maintains, tags almost anything not associated with billionaires as populist and thus “makes no useful discriminations at all” (p. 6). When one analyzes how conservative politicians have used cultural populist discourse closely, one finds that cultural populism does not simply entail a competition between high and low taste preferences. A better way to understand the discourse is as a political discourse that articulates, in variety of representational forms, an informal theory of class as a *cultural* identity. McGuian’s conceptualization of the term lacks a thorough class analysis and Kazin’s analysis does not acknowledge and take seriously the class-based elements of cultural populism and subsequently does not interrogate how and why these elements became associated with the conservative sociopolitical identity. I will elaborate on this more in chapter one.

aristocratic tastes (and lack of manliness).³¹

In the late 19th century, cultural populist themes appeared in the political rhetoric of the Populist Party. William Jennings Bryan, one of the most famous populist speakers in American history, excoriated “plutocratic wealth” but also expressed weariness about what he called, the “aristocracy of learning” and, in the early twentieth-century during the Scopes’s Trial, he would take more belligerent positions toward advanced formal education and credentialed expertise (Bryan, 1913, p. 362). In his article “Real Americans” (2010), historian William Hogeland demonstrates the central presence anti-elitist discourse had in the populist movement writing, “one of the hottest blasts of populist rhetoric was directed less at specific policies than at elites’ dismissal of ordinary people’s judgments” (para. 16). Moving into the early twentieth-century, populist radio personalities who supported the New Deal and FDR in the early 1930s such as Father Coughlin, William Anderson Jr. and Dr. John Brinkley each took oppositional stances to the professional-educated class (mainly because it was this group who most vigorously tried to get them off the air).³²

While cultural populist forms of political discourse were a significant part of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century political discourse, for the most part this brand of populism was overshadowed by other more predominant forms of populist rhetoric such as producerism and Evangelical, religious strains of populism.³³ However,

³¹ In his book *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America* (1991), Kenneth Cmiel highlights how Jackson and Lincoln transformed the class-cultural quality of American politics by introducing a more popular, vernacular style of speech to mainstream politics.

³² For scholarship on Father Coughlin see (Brinkley, 1982), for William Anderson Jr. see (Vaillant, 2004) and for John Brinkley see (Frank, 2004, p. 197).

³³ According to historian Michael Kazin (1998), the two streams of American populism that have been the most essential from the late 19th century throughout the 20th century are a moral-economic stream of populist discourse called producerism and a religious, Evangelical stream.

Marking one of the major transitions in the populist tradition, Kazin argues that the Populist movement of the 1880s and 1890s was transformative because it fused the preexisting economic-producerist elements of populist rhetoric with the rhetoric of the Social Gospel. Kazin maintains that the second major transition in the American populist tradition started to take place in late-1940s when the populist rhetorical style began its gradual migration from the Left to the Right. While the tensions between the economic and religio-cultural streams of populism were present in the Populist Party itself, these tensions would become heightened by a string of moral crusades in the beginning of the 20th century such as the Prohibition movement. Kazin maintains that not until the domestic wars of the 1960s and the rise of the Religious Right in the 1970s would the two streams of populism become fully disentangled. Since then, Kazin writes, “the gap between those who see ordinary Americans primarily in economic terms and those who view the people as belonging to the God has never really closed” (p. 4).

Following one of the principle arguments that has been made in academic work addressing the rise of the New Right, Kazin suggests that conservatives were better able to don a majoritarian image in the in late-1960s by formulating a cultural-religious brand of populism. According to Kazin and many others, conservative populism since the Nixon era has been essentially what one could describe as ‘culture war populism.’ With his 1991 book titled *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America culture*, James Davison Hunter was one the first to coin the phrase “culture wars” and was largely responsible for the growing popularity of the culture war argument. Hunter maintained that the central social conflict in the United States was based on the formation of two ideological camps whose differences were defined by their opposing positions over “hot button” moral and cultural issues like abortion, homosexuality, gun laws, separation of church and state, etc. This conflict, as documented by sociology of religion scholar Robert Wuthnow, had its roots in the battles that took place between the ‘modernists’ and the ‘fundamentalists’ in 1910s and 1920s, battles exemplified in struggles for the secularization of Ivy League universities and the Scope’s trial (Wuthnow, 1988).

The culture war rhetoric that emerged onto the political scene during the 1990s and remained central far into the 2000s can be seen as an extension of previous conservative narratives decrying the supposed advance of “moral decay” in America, narratives that were developed in 1970s and 80s during the political campaigns of conservative presidential candidates like George Wallace, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan. In the 1970s, Evangelical political organizations like Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority and media institutions like Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network quietly became immensely powerful organizational tools for the Republican Party. Long before Pat Buchanan’s ‘culture war speech’ at the 1992 Republican National Convention or Bill O’Reilly’s best seller *Culture Warrior* (2006), Evangelical political organizations and media networks laid the rhetorical ground work during the 1970s and 80s setting the foundation for the culture war frames and tropes that would pervade the politics of future eras (Boyer, 2008).

I fully agree with both the claim that Evangelical discourse has been central to the American populist tradition and that culture war populism has been and is central to conservative populist representational strategies. The problem is not that scholars of conservatism have acknowledged and shed light on this. The problem is that the immense focus on the religious elements of conservative discourse has lead many scholars and critics of the postwar conservative movement to conclude that these religious elements have come at the exclusion of class-based discourses. The overstated substitution-thesis articulated by critics like Thomas Frank which maintains that conservative populist discourses replace and redefine class conflict as religio-moral conflict misses the ways in which conservative political representations employ religious modes of populism in a manner so that they articulate with, as opposed to supplant, class-based populist modes.

In my analysis of Fox News programming I give less attention to the religious culture war rhetoric that is often associated with conservative populism as a way to deal with the deficit of

in the postwar period cultural populism would take center stage and this period would turn out to be one of the most generative moments of anti-elitist discourse in American political history. From 1950s to the 1970s, key developments would facilitate this discursive shift such as the unprecedented explosion of higher education, the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy and the rise of a “new class” of knowledge workers. According to sociologist Robert Wuthnow, the *partial* massification of higher education in postwar era shifted “the very basis of the social order” by making higher education, more than ever before, a major means of “stratifying the society into different subcultures” (1988, p. 163).³⁴ The rapid growth of higher education and the increased importance of the college degree in the labor market would significantly alter the patterned distribution of educational capital in the United States, expand the size the “professional class,” and amplify the visibility of professional class taste and middlebrow cultural forms.³⁵ All of these developments made the professional class and its growing

analysis done on the class-cultural elements of conservative populism. While I recognize how important culture war rhetoric is in Fox News programming discourse and in the conservative movement overall, religious signifiers, like regional signifiers such as “heartland,” are not the core organizing principles of Fox News’s representational system, especially during the Great Recession when culture war rhetoric clearly took a backseat to economic-based rhetoric. Instead, religious and heartland discourses serve and are made subordinate to the primary function of cultural populist discourse, which is to construct and perform cultural ordinariness, i.e. a popular or working-class cultural disposition. In other words, culture war discourse is useful mostly to the extent that it serves to help construct Fox News’s audience as a culturally ordinary subject.

³⁴ From the 1960 to 1970 the enrollment rate increased 139 percent and government expenditure rates altogether grew from only 5.6 billion in 1960 to 23.4 billion by 1970. For this data, see (Wuthnow, 1988, pp. 155-56).

³⁵ In the 1970s, debates proliferated amongst social scientists and political analysts about the arrival of a “new class” and, related to this, over the definition of who the professional class is. Some of the first theorists to use the term “new class” were left-leaning scholars who were concerned with the rising power of corporate managers, engineers, and technocrats. In contrast to their leftist counterparts, conservative thinkers like Irving Kristol and Kevin Phillips defined the new class as a group of anti-business, “self-designated” intellectuals who circulated in the media, government, and the philanthropic spheres of education. Apart from their differences, analysts from the left and the right characterized the “new class” or the professional class as being associated with high educational status, administrative activity, information gathering, and the

taste culture a more likely object of class resentment and, by extension, a more likely target in the political arena.

It is in this period, one sees a new populist breed of conservative politicians. From the 1950s to 1970s figures like Senator Joseph McCarthy, Alabama governor George Wallace, and vice-president Spiro Agnew would help fashion an anti-government brand of populism that would transform the meaning of ‘the elites’ and the ‘fat cats’ from FDR’s “private powers” and “economic royalists” to “limousine liberals” and educated elites. During the red scare in 1950s, McCarthy placed “twisted intellectuals” at the center of his communist conspiracy theory. McCarthy’s anti-communist crusade was not only effective at purging the socialist intellectual camp from the Democratic left (leaving only a social scientific and Keynesian one in its place), it laid the groundwork for conservative populism’s cultural-educational vision of the elites.

production of “intellectual” knowledge.

In his book *Professional Powers* (1986), Eliot Freidson maintains that one of the defining characteristics of the professional class is a tendency to possess specialized forms of knowledge and gain their legitimacy by the approval of professional peers and educational credentials. However, the professional class is not synonymous with experts because professionals are not only characterized by *what* they know but how they know what they know and how they *display* competency. In his book *The Future of the Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (1979), Alvin Gouldner maintains that professionals, whether the humanistic and technical intelligentsia, share what he calls a common “culture of careful and critical discourse” (p. 47), meaning they share a similar tendency toward formalized language, modes of analysis and justification. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) makes a similar point as Gouldner maintaining that while advanced educational institutions produce varying types of vocational skills and degrees, they also produce what he calls a ‘general culture’ across the professions. Bourdieu writes, “it is written into the tacit definition of the academic qualification formally guaranteeing a specific competence (like an engineering diploma) that it really guarantees possession of a ‘general culture’ (p. 25). Daniel Bell (1973) describes the professional class as, “the heart of the post-industrial society,” and like the other authors points to a broader cultural quality when describing professions writing, “A profession is a learned (i.e. scholarly) activity, and thus involves formal training, but with a *broad intellectual context*” [my emphasis] (p. 374). While there is no definitive definition of the “new class” or the professional class and even though the very existence of this class is debatable, there is a consensus in the new class literature which is that all authors stress the importance of how from 1970s onward the allocation of positions of authority in the labor process predominantly began to be distributed by virtue of college degree—this became true even in the business world, the famed arena of the self-made man. Also see (Briggs-Bruce, 1979; Steinfelds, 1979; Galbraith, 1998, pp. 243-54).

Picking up where McCarthy left off, in the 1960s Alabama governor and third party presidential candidate George Wallace described the elites as “pseudo-intellectuals.” Like McCarthy, Wallace was skilled at using electronic media and interviews to create confrontational exchanges with network journalists to gain notoriety. By exuding a working-class cultural disposition and by playing the role of the guileless common man who says what is on his mind in the face of polished, Northeastern media figures, Wallace endeared himself to many Americans and gained a national visibility (Kazin 1998, p. 232).³⁶ While Wallace is better known for his racist, segregationist politics, another important feature of Wallace’s political style that is given less attention was his astute sense of class resentments based on taste and educational differences. Wallace often entwined white supremacist appeals with attacks on cultural elites in effect wedding these different types politics together (an articulation that persists today).

Historian Michael Kazin writes:

[Wallace’s] main targets were powerful judges, “bureaucrats,” and “theoreticians” who wanted to foist “absurd” blueprints for change on average men and women. That many of those blueprints were attempts to aid black people was an essential element in the resistance mounted against them. But so was a widening cultural gulf between European-Americans that had as much to do with differences of class and with moral judgments as it did with their opinion about the rights of African-Americans. (1998, pp. 233-234)

Wallace’s notion of “foisting” over-intellectualized, “utopian” schemes onto ordinary people established an especially useful rhetorical frame for subsequent conservative populist because it rationalized cultural populism’s brand of class politics with a laissez-

³⁶ One of Wallace’s most famous television appearances was in June of 1963 when he appeared on *Meet the Press* and debated *New York Times* journalist Anthony Lewis over Alabama race relations and segregation (Kazin, 1998, p. 232).

faire ideological position. In the New Deal era, the idea of a positive state was seen as a corrective to the inhumane, uncaring quality of the market. In contrast, by wielding the newly acquired weapon of populism, the postwar conservative movement became increasingly more successful at presenting government intervention as an act of elitism, an affront to traditional knowledge and commonsense.³⁷

McCarthy and Wallace's story of a captured government directed by an educated elite would establish conservative populism's central story line, which I call the "narrative of the educated statist." This narrative was mirrored and reinforced by the intellectual sectors of the conservative movement during the 1970s. Conservative intellectuals such as William F. Buckley, Irving Kristol, William Simon, and Kevin Phillips each expressed an analysis of power that hinged on the idea of a "new class" of professionals that imposed their control over the nation through their leadership positions in major cultural and governmental institutions. As histories on conservative think tanks document, the 1970s was a crucial building period for the conservative knowledge establishment and it is in this formative moment that the conservative intellectual movement adopted the same oppositional representational strategy of their populist counterparts and began to define their intellectual project in negative terms, that is, as always a struggle against what historian Alice O'Connor refers to as the liberal "philanthropic-government-academic establishment" (2007, p. 75).³⁸

Yet, even though they shared a common enemy, many conservative intellectuals

³⁷ One sees an excellent example of this rationalization in an episode of *Glenn Beck*. Connecting the Progressive movement's support for a more positive state (e.g. welfare, business regulation) to cultural elitism, Beck argues that progressivism, "always means the suspicion of basic rights [negative liberties], because you are not smart enough. They'll take care of it" (5/27/2010).

³⁸ For work on the rise of conservative think tanks and the conservative intellectual movement see (Himmelstein, 1990, pp. 145-51; Phillips-Fein, Kim, 2009; Nash, 1998, pp. 334-341; Medvetz, (forth coming), Rich, 2004).

like Buckley detested Wallace's working-class cultural persona and feared that his appeals to working-class taste could inflame larger class resentments (Williamson, 1978, pp. 711-17). Unlike his more waspy intellectual peers, however, Nixon advisor Kevin Phillips recognized the critical importance of Wallace's conservative brand of populism to the conservative movement. Through his public persona and political style, Wallace was able to do what few major conservative politicians and media figures had been incapable of doing up until that point, which is, establish cultural bonds between the white working-class and political conservatism. If Wallace's cultural appeal and populist style could be replicated by mainstream Republican candidates, Phillips surmised, the Republican Party could shed its country club image and blunt its reputation as the party of the rich, an image and reputation that had repelled workers from the party for decades.

As part of their attempt to capture the working-class base of the Democratic Party, in the 1968 and 1972 presidential elections Richard Nixon, Kevin Phillips and other key Nixon strategists such as Pat Buchanan would incorporate Wallace's cultural populist themes, narrative, and style into Nixon's representational strategy but would fine tune and rework these elements to better suit mainstream politics. On one hand, the Nixon representational strategy would occlude the extreme qualities of McCarthyism and Wallacite populism by excluding McCarthy's conspiratorial anti-communism and Wallace's more overt, Southern style race politics (even while it took advantage of the "White Backlash" to the Civil Rights movement's gains and supported segregationist policies with state's rights arguments) (Kazin, 1998). On the other hand, it would accentuate the most popular aspects of these early conservative populists' respective styles. Nixon and especially Nixon's vice-president Spiro Agnew assumed a hostile posture to the media and engaged journalists in a similar pugnacious way McCarthy and

Wallace did. And directly emulating Wallace, the Nixon strategy appealed to working-class tastes and cultural forms by reaching out to and campaigning through the country music industry.³⁹

Though these representational practices and among others, the Nixon administration and the Republican Party constructed a conservative populist subject, which would take on the name the 'silent majority.' As opposed to labor and income class distinctions that defined the New Deal's 'forgotten man,' the class edge of the silent majority was defined in terms of education and taste. The descent of the labor movement and the rise of the New Right have often been interpreted by leftist critics as equivalent to the absolute decline of class-consciousness in United States.⁴⁰ Instead, I

³⁹ In his numerous presidential campaigns, George Wallace the first nationally known politician to regularly feature country music acts at his rallies and to use country music celebrities as key public endorsements. Furthermore, George Wallace's campaign strategically placed ads on country music radio stations and used the demographic information of those stations to determine where to best hold rallies in non-southern states, a practice Richard Nixon and subsequent conservative politicians would repeat (Kazin, 1998; La Chapelle, 2007; Pecknold, 2007). President Richard Nixon and other conservative politicians learned how important these taste-based appeals and symbolic gestures of cultural affiliation were in capturing the white working-class bloc of the New Deal coalition and followed suit. Nixon was the first American president to both invite country musicians to play at the White House, notably, he invited Merle Haggard to the White House, whose 1969 hit song "Okie From Muskogee" became a counter-culture anthem for the Right and helped build the association of political conservatism with "square" working-class taste and country music. Also, Nixon was the first American president to attend the Grand Ole Opry (Feder, 2006). Before the respective presidential campaigns of Wallace and Nixon in the late-1960s and 1970s, the country music industry had remained fairly bipartisan for most of its history (Willman, 2005; Malone, 2002). However, since then, the genre and the industry has been associated and institutionally connected to the Republican Party and conservative political media.

As a way to capture working-class votes outside of the South, both Wallace and Nixon reached out to white ethnic groups in the Northeast as well by making cultural appeals suited to their regional and ethnic cultures. Throughout the 1968 campaign Nixon targeted and appeared at Polish, Italian, Irish and other white ethnic cultural events (Skrentny and Sugrue, 2008).

⁴⁰ Many leftist critics and scholars reiterating long held arguments about 'American Exceptionalism' and 'false-consciousness' have interpreted the postwar decline of income and labor-centric definitions of class as the total decline of class politics in American culture. Literature on 'American Exceptionalism' is anchored on German sociologist Werner Sombart's 1905 article "Why is there no socialism in the United States?" Akin to this question is why are the working class in the United States so politically weak or another variation, why do they lack class-consciousness? See (Sombart, 1906; Perlman, 1966; Hartz, 1955; Lipset, 1963; Karabel, 1979,

would argue, what one sees in the period from the 1950s to the 1970s is not the end of class identity in the U.S. but rather its transmutation into a cultural-educational formation.⁴¹ This cultural-educational formation was made possible by the material restructuring of the national economy and the growing culture and belief system of an expanding college educated social class, a class that stood to gain the most from the new high-tech, information economy. However, these conditions alone did not bring about this cultural-educational class formation. The class-cultural subject that emerged in this period was centrally *constructed* by conservative populists in the political arena who made sense of the postindustrial economy by developing a compelling narrative of class conflict and, with it, a theorization of class as a cultural identity. The cultural populist strategy that was innovated by McCarthy and Wallace and refined by the Nixon administration would have an enduring impact on American political discourse as evident by the fact that, today, the practice of painting one's political adversary as an cultural elitist stands as a hallmark of American politics. While the cultural populist narrative and conceptualization of class would become important for future Republican political leaders

Davis 1986). For critiques of the American Exceptionalism argument and case for the centrality of class consciousness in American political culture see (Wilentz, 1984; Norrell, 1990). For an example the latest and most popular iteration of the false-consciousness argument see (Frank 2004). I will engage the issue of false-consciousness in greater length in the conclusion.

⁴¹ There is sociological evidence to support the growth and existence of this class-cultural-educational formation. In their study, "Trends in Educational Assortative Marriage from 1940 to 2003" (2005), Christine Schwartz and Robert Mare shows that in the last sixty years who Americans end up marrying has become increasingly determined by educational level. At present, educational level has become a greater predictor of marriage selection than religious denomination and has even, according to some studies, surpassed race as a factor for determining marriage choice (that is, depending on select types of interracial marriages) (Qian, 1997). Numerous other studies demonstrate similar patterns in the U.S. and abroad (Blossfeld and Timm, 2003; Raymo and Xie, 2000). In a recent *New York Times* by Sabrina Tavernise engages the issue of growing wealth inequality and asserts that the increase in educated-based marriage homogamy strongly reinforces it see (2012, February) "Education Gap Grows between Rich and Poor, Studies Say." Retrieved from *The New York Times* <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/education/education-gap-grows-between-rich-and-poor-studies-show.html?pagewanted=all>.

such as George W. Bush and, more recently, vice-presidential candidate Sara Palin, it would become a much stronger blueprint for the conservative political talk industry that would emerge in the late-1980s and would flourish with Limbaugh in the 1990s and Fox News in the 2000s.

A Genealogy of Producerism

Unlike cultural populism, which really made its appearance in the mid-twentieth-century, producerism has been a major strain of populist political discourse since the colonial era.⁴² Michael Kazin, one of the leading historians of populism, maintains that from the nineteenth well into the twentieth century, the “producer ethic” has been, he writes, “the central element in populist conceptions of “the people.” Continuing he explains, “Producerism was indeed an ethic, a moral conviction: it held that only those who created wealth in tangible, material ways...could be trusted to guard the nation’s piety and liberties” (1998, p. 13). In addition to representing the “producers” of society as the special protectors to the republic, producerist political rhetoric has always had an antagonistic framework and told a story of theft, whereby an elite, parasitic class siphons the wealth of the noble producers for their own benefit. As Kazin suggests, producerism is first and foremost a moral discourse but it is one that has been particularly used to critique and justify the socioeconomic order and the system of wealth distribution.

The intellectual basis of this moral logic is significantly derived from the writings of John Locke. In the seventeenth-century, Locke formulated a republican theory of

⁴² As well, its themes and tropes can be found in the political discourse of the British Revolution and the Chartist movement of the mid-nineteenth-century and as well producerist discourse appeared during the French Revolution and during the Napoleonic Wars (Jones, 1983, p. 169; Laclau, 2005, p. 90). The French producer tradition is different than the Anglo and American forms partly because it is rooted in the ideas of Physiocratic political economy as opposed to Scottish political economy (Burke, 1995, pp. 11-13).

property and wealth distribution that was based on what he referred as the “workmanship” ideal, which maintains that the proper basis of resource distribution and property entitlement is determined by the individual labor that was contributed (Locke 1988; p. 464; Shapiro, 1991). Following a core tenet of republican political philosophy, Locke asserted that the recognition and achievability of economic independence (i.e. individual property/labor) is a necessary precondition for political independence and the best safeguard against tyranny. In turn, coming back to the issue of wealth distribution and property, this economic independence is founded on a conceptualization of labor as an individual act and the laborer as an autonomous subject, a conceptualization that is still expressed in contemporary producerist discourse (Appleby, 1984; Pocock, 2003; Wood, 1998; Scott, 1977; Katz, 1976).

Notable to the formation of producerist populist discourse, Locke was one of the first major Western theorists to use a frame of analysis that split society between an “idle” class and an “industrious” class (Shapiro, 1991). But most importantly, Locke’s writings on property and distribution were premised on the most fundamental tenet of producerist discourse: “the labor theory of value.” The labor theory of value, at its most basic level, is the political economic assertion that value and wealth are primarily derived from human labor. The labor theory of value appeared in the mid-seventeenth century and was debated and discussed amongst political economists for more than two centuries thereafter (Meek, 1976). In this broad scope of time, it took many different forms and was attached to divergent political traditions, republicanism being one. The high point of the theory’s usage amongst political economists was during the Scottish Enlightenment and, as its zenith, Adam Smith’s publication of his famous book *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776).

Greatly influenced by the Anglo republican political tradition and the Scottish Enlightenment, American revolutionaries such as James Madison and Thomas Jefferson articulated Smithian concepts of wealth generation and the division of labor with Locke's republican theory of property distribution (Huston, 1998, chapter one). In revolutionary era parlance, as historian James Huston documents, these two tenets were joined and expressed by the phrase "the fruits of labor." In his book *Chants Democratic* (1986), historian Sean Wilentz calls the configuration of these themes in the rhetoric of revolutionary and Jacksonian era artisan political movements "producer republicanism." With the establishment of "universal" suffrage (for white men) and the subsequent development of mass-based political parties and artisan political organizations in the 1830s, republican ideology and the labor theory of value became popularized and translated into a popular idiom and expressed through antagonistic, anti-elitist rhetorical frames (Burke, 1995; Wilentz, 1986).⁴³ While Adam Smith's writings defined productive labor and productive market actors more broadly, the artisan/agrarian working men parties that dominated nineteenth-century American politics firmly defined them as those who did manual labor.⁴⁴

For nearly the entire scope of the nineteenth century, the labor theory of value predominated both intellectual and popular-political discourse. Demonstrating its ideological versatility, the labor theory was used to justify "Indian Removal" by president

⁴³ However, it is important to note that even before the Jackson era as early as the 1780s Jeffersonian pamphleteers were celebrating those who toil "with hammer and hand" and were defining manual workers as the "industrious part of the community" (Kazin, 1998, p. 13). In his book *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (1977), Eric Foner shows how the rhetoric of Paineite, artisan groups in Philadelphia framed "mechanics" and workers as the productive class as early as the 1770s.

⁴⁴ Paralleling this focus on manual labor, two of the most prominent political economists of the nineteenth century David Ricardo and Karl Marx were, at the intellectual level, asserting a more exclusive definition of productive labor that located the source of economic value as primarily coming from manual labor, the closet point of production.

Andrew Jackson (Saxton, 1990) and the abolition of slavery by president Abraham Lincoln (Foner, 1970; 1974). It was central to the rhetoric of urban, working-class movements like the Knights of Labor (1880s) and various radical farmer movements (1860s-1890s) (Goodwyn, 1978; Kazin, 1998). In the antebellum period, it was mainly used to support laissez-faire economic policies. However, in the mid to late-nineteenth-century producerism and the labor theory of value began to be modified in unprecedented ways. As a culmination of the radical agrarian movements, in 1891 a third party called the People's Party or the Populist Party was established. The Populist Party deployed the labor theory of value to resist the advancement of industrial capitalism, or at least its most deleterious consequences such as the spread of the wage system, managerial administration over labor and the polarization of wealth.⁴⁵ For the most part the Populist Party's rhetoric conformed to the republican theory of property. However, the Populist Party's rhetoric and political platform departed from the laissez-faire orthodoxy of the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian tradition and used the labor theory of value to justify stronger state involvement in the economy and it even called for the nationalization of major industries such as the rail roads, the telegraph and the banks (Palmer, 1980; Schiller, 1996; Pollack, 1966). In the early twentieth century, the Socialist Party (1900-1920) articulated the labor theory of value with more radical, anti-capitalist discourses and, using a Marxist conception of the theory, asserted a more collectivist notion of labor and wealth generation that challenged the individualistic, Lockean conception (Salvatore, 1982).

The appropriation of the labor theory of value and producerist populist rhetoric by

⁴⁵ For more work on nineteenth-century republican ideology and its manifestation in populist political rhetoric also see (Noble, 1985; Montgomery, 1981).

these later movements marked a fundamental shift in producerist discourse. This shift is partly due to the fact that these later movements faced a radically different economic landscape than Jefferson, Jackson and Lincoln era producer republican groups. They witnessed the death throes the artisan/agrarian political economic order and the rise a new, corporate form of capitalism characterized by unprecedented degrees of economic inequality and by firms whose scope, size, and complexity were greater than anything seen before. With Taylorization of industry and the deskilling of labor, the artisan producer's primary source of moral authority and political righteousness, their "craft," was transformed, abstracted and diminished.

Around this same time, the labor of theory of value was losing its explanatory legitimacy within intellectual circles and the field of economics (Kauder, 1965).⁴⁶ Only in the writings of leftist intellectuals and in the political rhetoric of the labor movement and the New Deal coalition did the labor theory of value live on in the first half of the twentieth-century. At this advanced stage of industrial capitalism, however, producerism's articulation of republican ideology with the labor theory of value was—as the Populist Party and the socialists of the early twentieth-century discovered—problematic for making critiques of the corporate-industrial system. The Lockean theory of property that underpinned producerism's analysis of wealth distribution could only

⁴⁶ While the labor theory of value stood as the dominant paradigm of political economy throughout the eighteenth-century and for most of the nineteenth-century, by the late-nineteenth-century it had been replaced by the marginal utility theory. Corresponding with the rise of retail districts, the advertising industry, and mass consumption (Schudson, 1986), the marginal utility theory located the production of value in consumer preferences and the price system. As the field of economics became more mathematical and as economists started to increasingly use naturalistic and evolutionary language to explain economic trends like corporate gigantism, the "political" in political economics was increasingly dropped in the early twentieth century (Hutchison, 1972; Kauder, 1965). This new, neoclassical model of economics privileged relations between prices and commodities and underemphasized the analytical importance of social relations within market structures, which was the emphasis of the great classical political economists such as John Locke, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Karl Marx (Dasgupta, 1983).

explain plutocratic tendencies in the social order as being the result of political corruption and government favoritism. Lacking an analysis of how economic injustice could originate from the private economy itself, producerism had to be altered for it to serve the progressive agenda.

As opposed to abandoning the discourse, the New Deal coalition dealt with this problem by retaining producerism's narrative of theft and moral logic of wealth distribution (e.g. labor theory of value) on one hand and by negating the discourse's long-standing state-centric analysis of power on the other. During the Great Depression era, the brand of rhetorical producerism president Franklin Roosevelt and the Democratic Party fashioned to advance their New Deal agenda was unprecedented in light of the discourse's previous history because it presented government not as the enemy of economic egalitarianism but instead as its main agent and ally (Wilentz, 2002, p. 77). In his address to the Democratic National Convention in 1936, FDR justifies this reversal and articulates the New Deal version of the producer tradition:

For too many of us the political equality we once had won was meaningless in the face of economic inequality. A small group had concentrated into their own hands an almost complete control over other people's property, other people's money, other people's labor—other people's lives. For too many of us life was no longer free; liberty no longer real; men could no longer follow the pursuit of happiness. Against economic tyranny such as this, the American citizen could appeal only to the organized power of government.⁴⁷

In this first line, Roosevelt explains why, in an age of corporate gigantism, one cannot simply claim that the deficiencies of the political system are the main cause of the problems with the economic system, as is the analytical tendency in the nineteenth-

⁴⁷ Roosevelt, F. D., (June 27). Acceptance Speech for the Renomination for the Presidency. The American Presidency Project. Retrieved from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=15314>.

century form of producerism.⁴⁸ This point is made again in the last line where Roosevelt explains why government intervention is needed to reestablish a just distribution of wealth. Something one only hears today from conservative figures, in the middle lines Roosevelt uses the rhetoric of “other people’s property,” “money,” and “labor,” to articulate the New Deal’s producerist narrative of theft. In the context of 1930s political culture, the victim of this theft was primarily represented as the industrial, wageworker, “the forgotten man” as Roosevelt called him in his famous 1932 radio address.

At the apogee of the New Deal’s reform agenda in the mid-1930s, a time when the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and Roosevelt’s administration were in their greatest accord, New Deal rhetoric especially used the rhetoric of productive labor and the oppositional politics of anti-monopoly. Like all forms of producerism whether left or right, the New Dealers attacked the “manipulators of other people’s money and the exploiters of other people’s labor.”⁴⁹ However, unlike right-wing articulations of producerism, for the New Dealers, the parasites and vampires were the bankers and the capitalist, “private power [s]” that were indigenous to the private sector as opposed to actors manipulating the private sector from government perches.

The producerism of the New Deal coalition, its combative tone, its populist posture, was, in light of the New Deal’s broader history, a product of a momentary trend that spiked during the early to mid-1930s. By the end of the 1930s and during the

⁴⁸ In the same speech, Roosevelt addresses his contemporary critics who attacked the New Deal on basis that it was a departure from the principles of the Revolution and the Founding Fathers. Roosevelt maintains that the “whole structure of modern life” i.e. the industrial America, was “undreamed of by the Fathers” and asserts that they did not account for “economic tyranny” and what he called the “dynastic scheme of things” i.e. corporate oligopolies. Roosevelt argued that the New Deal was true to the principles of the Revolution because it attacked tyranny and promoted an economically egalitarian society, something the Framers asserted was necessary to uphold a republican society.

⁴⁹ New York State Labor Non-Partisan League, “Declaration of Principles,” July 16, 1936, taken from (Fraser, 1989 p. 70).

interwar period, the New Deal movement transitioned from what historians Gary Gerstle and Steve Fraser refer to as “social Keynesianism” to “commercial Keynesianism.”⁵⁰ With the turn to commercial Keynesianism and solidification of the postwar “liberal consensus,” New Dealers and the labor movement abandoned previous attempts to fundamentally reorganize American capitalism through the direct management of some of its major institutions and instead sought to change capitalism moderately by steering or “fine tuning” the economy through fiscal and monetary policies. The commercial Keynesian approach envisioned what Alan Brinkley calls a “compensatory government” that could solve the central issues of the Depression (e.g. wealth inequality, monopoly, and Labor/Capital conflict) not by taking direct measures to address them but by placating and offsetting their negative effects through creating capitalist abundance, mass consumption and higher living standards (Brinkley, 1989; Hodgson, 1976).⁵¹

Ironically, the social programs and welfare infrastructure that the New Deal political project built would diminish, in the postwar period, the very producerist mode of identification that gave it moral authority and popular appeal in its early stages. With the spread of suburbanization and consumer culture, the working-class base of the New Deal coalition increasingly identified more with homeownership and consumption as opposed to labor and production (Lipsitz, 1994; Nicolaidis, 2002; La Chapelle, 2007). The decline of producerist modes of identification and rhetoric was mirrored in the CIO, the core grassroots political base of the New Deal coalition. As Fraser points out in his article “The ‘Labor Question’” (1989), by the postwar period the goals of full employment

⁵⁰ See (Steve and Gerstle, 1989, p. xiv). Fraser and Gerstle originally took the terms ‘social Keynesianism’ and ‘commercial Keynesianism’ from Theda Skocpol and Margaret Weir from their article “State Structures and the Possibilities For ‘Keynesian’ responses to the Great Depression in Sweden, Britain, and the United States” (1985, pp. 108, 151n).

⁵¹ Also see Mike Davis’ discussion on ‘welfare capitalism’ in (1986, pp. 108-117).

and expanded mass consumption came to overshadow the CIO's previous focus on worker control and "the politics of production." In turn, the CIO's acceptance and even embrace of industrial scientific management (i.e. "the New Unionism"), centralized bureaucracy, and technocratic government administration, blunted the anti-establishmentarian, populist sensibility that the movement exuded in the 1930s.⁵² According to Fraser, the shift toward commercial Keynesianism drained New Deal project of its "moral preeminence, its political threat, and its elemental social significance" (p. 57). Fraser suggests that one of the crucial bases of the New Deal's moral thrust derived from the "oppositional politics" of the early New Deal, which was grounded on "the antimonopoly movement and its venerated ideology of productive labor" (56).⁵³ From the mid-1930s onward, the Democratic left's political economic arguments relied less on a producerist moral claim and more on the authority of technocratic expertise.⁵⁴

⁵² In his book *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (1994), George Lipsitz documents how in the rank-and-file of the labor movement lashed back against the technocratic, corporatist mode of unionism that took hold in the interwar period by engaging in numerous wildcat strikes. Foreshadowing the anti-crony capitalist rhetoric conservatives would deploy in the late-2000s Recession, Lipsitz shows how conservative politicians in this same era like Senator Robert Taft and conservative organizations such as the National Association of Manufacturers exploited the contradictions of New Deal/New Unionism corporatism by highlighting its support for big, international capital, over small, local capital (i.e. small businesses) and its tendency toward regimentation, bureaucratic centralization and a general unresponsiveness to the popular will (pp. 161-167). Also see (Lichtenstein, 1989).

⁵³ For a sympathetic analysis of the New Deal coalition and Popular Front's appropriation of producer republicanism see Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front* (1997), chapter four, "The Rise and Fall of the Lincoln Republic." For a critique of Denning and Popular Front producerism see George Lipsitz's *American Studies in the Moment of Danger* (2001), chapter two "Sent for You Yesterday, Her You Come Today: Who Needs the Thirties?" (pp. 45-56).

⁵⁴ The only major moral-economic claim that persisted amongst the Democratic left after the eclipse of the social Keynesianism was what historian David Montgomery calls 'the mutualistic ethic,' which was another central theme of 1930s politics (1979, pp. 25). For a more in depth analysis of how the moral-economic values of American culture changed in the Great Depression era see Robert S. McElvaine's book *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (1993), chapter nine titled, "Moral Economics: American Values and Culture in the Great Depression." Rather than the 'mutualistic' ethic, Stuart Hall's uses the term the "caring ethic" to describe the moral

It wouldn't be until the 'conservative backlash' to the Great Society and the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s that the producerism and the labor theory of value would return to mainstream politics. However, at this juncture, this discourse would reemerge in an anti-welfare, pro-business, right-wing form of producerism. Similar to Jeffersonian-Jacksonian producerism, the postwar conservative brand of producerism advanced laissez-faire economic positions. However, unlike the producerism of the nineteenth-century, which more strongly targeted monopolies and concentrations of wealth, the postwar conservative appropriation of producerism was centered on the idea of the "welfare queen" and framed a racialized underclass as the primary parasitic social group of society. This postwar, conservative brand of producerism voiced little to no concern about wealth inequality or plutocracy. In short, unlike the producer republican discourse of the nineteenth-century, postwar conservative producerism placed far greater emphasis on attacking social welfare than on corporate welfare.⁵⁵

As simultaneous move away from manufacturing and thus manual labor and the increasing emphasis on information, service and finance-oriented sectors of the U.S. created advantageous material conditions for the conservative movement to re-present the business class as members of the producing class, a imaginary class white blue-collar workers had long been the symbol of. Transformations in the political economic

premise behind the welfare state and I find this term useful for describing Franklin Roosevelt's call for Americans to help the less fortunate and the downtrodden during the Depression (1988, p. 47). The caring ethic was at the heart of Great Society and one stills sees it expressed in modern Democratic rhetoric such as when Democratic president Barack Obama criticizes conservative economics as "own your own economics."

⁵⁵ George Lipsitz has called this postwar brand of conservative producerism "new right whiteness" and describes it as a political project that, "seeks to recruit middle-class and working-class whites to pro-corporate understandings of citizenship, property rights, land use and resource exploitation" (2008, p. 102). Lipsitz argues that this 'new right whiteness' is an extension of the 'white backlash' that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s in the wake of major political gains raced-based social movements had achieved. Also see (Lipsitz, 1998).

structure and labor market facilitated attempts by conservative politicians to frame entrepreneurs and blue-collar workers as being part of one singular producer camp, specifically this was achieved by framing the business class and white working-class as having a common opposition to the recently emerged bloc of educated knowledge workers who stood above the white working-class and supposedly disdained capitalism and entrepreneurial ambitions and also against the significantly enlarged bloc of female workers and minorities in the service sector below. Writing about the shift from “old” industrial economy and the “new” post-industrial economy in his book *Caught in the Crossfire* (2005), Larry Grossberg writes:

In the new economy, the moral and economic status of workers, who were at one time thought to be the creators of economic value and wealth, declines. And more jobs appear in the service industries...the United States has a significantly higher proportion of people working in low-productivity/low-wage jobs of the service economy than any other advanced industrial nation. The welfare of the workers declines almost directly in proportion to the increasing status of entrepreneurs, who, through their willingness to take risks, are now seen to produce the real wealth of the nation. (p. 123)

In chapter four, I elaborate on the important gender and racial dimensions of this shift and the central role that race and gender played in the conservative capture of the white, male working-class in this moment. For now, what is critical is how one sees the moral status of the entrepreneur elevated at this moment and the business class’ gradual inclusion into the definition of the producers. It is not a coincidence that this inclusion corresponds with the fall of Keynesianism in the field of economics and the rise of *neoclassical* and monetarist free market economics. It is during the 1970s that, as historians Steven Fraser and Gary Gerstle write, one sees, “the startling recapture of the mind and soul of the Republican party by an old orthodoxy: the moral and commercial

axioms of the nineteenth century's free market ideology" (1989, p. 296), i.e. the moral rhetoric of producerism.

With the rapid growth of the conservative knowledge establishment in the 1970s and 1980s, both within the academy (e.g. the Chicago School) and without (e.g. the Heritage Foundation), the conservative movement would appropriate and customize the populist producer tradition and deploy its moral-economic principles in order to translate the radical supply-side and monetarist policies of its intellectual faction into a popular, moral language. The two core components of this project involved racializing welfare and framing those reliant on government assistance as society's principle parasites and it also involved constructing the business class as the being society's central producers. I refer to this conservative, postwar articulation of producerism as "entrepreneurial producerism."

While present throughout the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, entrepreneurial producerism would be foregrounded in conservative political discourse arguably to its greatest degree during the late-2000s Recession, when the frames of the business class as "job creators" blanketed the national media. During the Great Recession, conservative political discourse on Fox News continued to rely on the racially accented, anti-welfare elements of entrepreneurial producerism as it scapegoated poor and minority homeowners. However, it also included, especially in the time between the financial collapse of September 2008 and the first half of 2009, a strong focus on the political class, its corporate allies, and the maldistribution of wealth. This crony capitalist strain shares a much closer resemblance to nineteenth-century forms of producer republicanism. The popular-democratic critique the Tea Party movement voiced over the bailouts and the stimulus package helped reenergize and reassert this anti-crony

capitalist strain of producerism in the discursive repertoire of the modern right and in Fox News programming discourse. However, as I demonstrate in chapter four, Fox News's attack on crony capitalism in the form of the "bailouts," and "pork projects" strategically becomes entwined with the network's attacks on welfare and social programs so that dismantling public programs that serve the poor and working-class come to share the same moral rationale as the need to break up corporate-government collusions and abolish corporate favoritism.

Chapter Compendium

This dissertation attempts to reveal the subtleties of the populist rhetoric of Fox News and its political power in framing the Great Recession. In chapter one "Antagonistic News: the Logic of Fox Populism," I outline the key formal components of Fox News's populist representational strategy and present a theoretical model for understanding the ideological functions these components serve. First, I discuss and demonstrate the most basic component of Fox News's populist address, the oppositional framework elaborated by the network that presents Fox News as an anti-establishment news organization—shunned by the journalism community and adored by "hard working Americans." Fox News's top programs continually suggest that the conservative political community stands as the popular majority and authentic core of the nation. Using "lowbrow" forms of public affairs media programming drawn from daytime talk shows, talk radio and tabloid newspapers, the star hosts are able to develop unconventional anchoring styles and working-class on-air personas. Unlike leftist narratives of class that emphasize socioeconomic differences, Fox News's brand of class politics associates class divisions with taste and educational differences, and uses them to conceptualize

conservatism as a class identity.

In chapter two, “‘think and talk like them’: Representing Class as a Taste Culture and Brand of Intelligence,” I apply the theoretical model for interpreting cultural populism that I develop in chapter one to textual examples in Fox News’s programming. In this chapter, I demonstrate how Fox News’s top programs align themselves with working-class culture, first, by having the hosts express hostile attitudes toward “high” culture and a personal affinity with working-class taste; second, by employing hosts who exude a working-class cultural disposition; and third, by asserting the existence of a distinct working-class intelligence or what I call the *popular intellect*. All three help to build the working-class identity of Fox News.

The summary of chapter three was previously discussed in my overview of Fox News’s Recession narrative. In chapter four, “Creating the Conservative Legacy of the Great Depression: Racializing the Stimulus Act through the Collective Memory of the Great Depression,” I show how Fox News programs attempt to reverse the political sensibility of the Great Depression from a leftist orientation to a conservative one by presenting modern conservatives as the rightful heirs of the Depression generation’s legacy. First, I show how Fox News top programs utilize the iconic film footage and photographs of the Depression in order to engage the “collective memory” and popular understanding of the historical event. In foregrounding poverty, the Depression era iconography conveys the leftist politics of 1930s and, therefore, poses a problem for Fox News’s pro-business, trickle down politics. However, as I’ll demonstrate, this iconography predominantly features white, male workers as well, and, thus, on the basis of a shared whiteness, producer ethic, and masculine conception of labor, Fox News programs effectively used this iconography to establish cultural bonds between the

viewer and the Depression generation. In addition, Fox News programs highlighted minorities, young people and women in its representation of the Obama generation in order draw starker contrasts between the FDR generation and present day Democrats. While Fox News programs obscured the Depression generation's reliance on New Deal programs and their political leftism, they framed the contemporary recipients of stimulus aid as welfare dependents who, in their supposed lack of a producerist ethic and moral integrity, are fundamentally different from the "Greatest Generation."

In chapter five "Fox News, a Place for Intellectuals?: How Fox News uses Expert Knowledge without Being Elitist Snobs," I demonstrate how Fox News's top programs deploy elite knowledge and expert authorities while maintaining their populist mode of address. In 2009, an unprecedented number of academics, think tank researchers, and experts appeared on Fox News's top shows to lend "official" legitimacy to Fox's analysis of the stimulus bill and its reinterpretation of Great Depression history. Because of its populist broadcasting style, critics of Fox News often assume the network is anti-intellectual. However, in this chapter I demonstrate how Fox News's performed hostility toward intellectuals is deceptive. Rather than being anti-intellectual, I show how Fox News's top programs often serve as a public platform for the conservative intelligentsia and as a popular translator of free market research. So as not to threaten the populist identity of the program, Fox News's top programs use various techniques to downplay and counter-balance the elite quality of the conservative intellectuals these programs feature. I refer to the interplay and orchestration of populist and intellectual modes of persuasion that Fox News's program use as the "populist-intellectual tactic" (PIT) and in this chapter I demonstrate how Fox News programs use this tactic to link conservative intellectual arguments to the viewer's popular knowledge of the Depression. In aligning

different class-based cultural authorities and sources of knowledge to advance the same historical argument, Fox News creates the appearance of a new consensus about the New Deal, one seemingly shared in elite academic circles and by the commonsense thinking host.

I have explained my choice to look at this particular period of Fox News programming and I laid out the customized interpretative strategies Fox News's turned to in their coverage of the Recession. In the second appendix, I explain why I chose to only examine Fox News's opinion shows and not its news programming and why I chose to only look at three particular programs on Fox News: *Glenn Beck*, *Hannity*, and *The O'Reilly Factor*. In this section, I explain the unique qualities of each show and describe the key differences between them. Though there are some important differences between Fox News's top three shows, in the end, the core representational components of these top shows are fundamentally the same: each uses a populist mode of address, each host performs a working-class cultural disposition, and each program asserts a supply-side interpretation of the Great Recession. I pay attention to the idiosyncrasies of each of the top shows throughout the dissertation, but I invest more energy examining the similarities between the shows than their differences. This is because I believe the crucial part of Fox News's appeal as a network is how its various programs exude a unified narrative, style and aesthetic that builds the network's comprehensive brand, which, in turn, has a mutually reinforcing effect for each individual show.

Fox News's populist framing of political news combined with its continuous attempt to affiliate itself with working-class culture is the engine that makes Fox News's representational strategy work. In this dissertation, I will take apart this engine and look at the various ways in which Fox used populist rhetoric and working-class culture to

frame the late-2000s Recession. Only by taking *Fox populism* seriously can one begin to understand how the network has been able to relentlessly defend corporate America and those in the highest tax bracket and at the same time claim to be “looking out for the folks.”

Chapter One: Antagonistic News and the Logic of Fox Populism

Contemporary television news programs are overflowing with semiotic content. All at once the viewer's eyes and ears are struck by the host's and guests' verbal rhetoric, their body language, the network's brand icon and ticker on the bottom of the screen shuttling information across the screen, the graphics and text that appear and disappear, the multiple video windows above the anchor's shoulders recycling footage, the hyper-stylized set design, the mesmerizing color schemes and shapes that fluctuate in the background and more. In the case of Fox News's top programs, I argue that this seemingly unwieldy bulk of visual and audio information is unified by an underlying populist representational framework. As political theorist Yannis Stavrakakis explains, all populist modes of representation conceptualize "the totality of a society around a fundamental antagonism" (p. 234). Fox News programming consistently dichotomizes and simplifies the social world into two opposing camps: 'the people' versus 'the elites.' At the textual level, the array of content that is presented to the viewers —everything from the featured news items to the policy issues to the visuals to anchor's personality— is arranged by and interpreted through the underlying antagonistic meaning structure of Fox News's representational system. This is common across all three of Fox News' top shows.

So the battle lines have been drawn, as the nation is deeply involved in the most intense political debate in years. President Obama has the power of his office. And most of the media squarely behind him. The folks have the folks. We'll see who prevails

(The O'Reilly Factor 8/13/2009)

Here's the bigger picture. The government is sanctioning a system of two classes of citizens here. The elite that vote for Obama, they get benefits. The rest of us that oppose him, we get punished, and we have to pay taxes for everybody. *(Hannity 1/15/2010)*

America, as the truth of our economic situation becomes clear over the next year or so, I believe the country will divide itself into two camps: the politicians and the elites who don't have the will to do the right thing or even tell you the truth, and then, the rest of us, the rank-and-file. *(Glenn Beck 2/2/2010)*

These excerpts all use populist signifiers naming the people and the elites: “the media,” “politicians,” “the government,” “the rest of us,” “the rank-and-file,” “the folks.” However, these populist categories have little or no meaning independent of the relation of antagonism (Laclau, 2001, 2005). They are given political meaning by oppositional positioning with phrases like “battle lines,” “a system of two classes,” “divide itself into two camps.” While these quotes offer explicit examples of the antagonistic framework that underlies Fox News’s meaning structure, any iteration of ‘the people’ or ‘the elite’ can by itself, unaccompanied by oppositional language, invoke the network’s larger narrative of political struggle. This is because Fox News’s programming takes advantage of the built up discursive repertoire of the postwar conservative movement and has over its 16 year existence continually reiterated its populist themes, story lines, and traditional discourses.

But how does this relate to the journalistic dimension of Fox News programming? Like the populist signifiers themselves, the various news items, events, set of facts, and persons of interest that are presented in the course of a given broadcast are situated within the network’s larger narrative of social conflict and political struggle. For example,

taking a segment on the passage of Obama's health care bill aired March 24, 2010 on *The O'Reilly Factor*, one finds the usual type of information that one would expect to accompany news about a major policy event. Various sets of statistics are cited, other news analyses are referenced, and congress members are interviewed to discuss the policy. However, departing from traditional news coverage, all of these bits of information are placed within the context of an overarching, if not epic, social conflict. O'Reilly begins the episode with his customary introductory segment entitled "talking points memo." Addressing the audience with a direct gaze, he says:

When you cut through all the bologna, the controversy in America today is over freedom. Those lined up against the Obama administration believe the federal government is becoming too intrusive...On the left, the pro-Obama people say there is unfairness in America that needs to be corrected by the Feds...the freedom issue is crucial. In *The New York Times* lead editorial today, that far-left paper celebrates Obama care and urges the president to continue spending billions of dollars to protect individual Americans from just about everything. In addition, the *Times* wants the Feds to take over the education system, the energy industry, and control the banking system. This is what many Americans fear, that the USA will become a top-down society. That is, the government will tell citizens and business what to do and when to do it.

The news event—the passage of the health care bill—has a secondary role in the presentational priorities of the program. It functions as a peg or a segue for the program's true foci: constructing and identifying two oppositional social blocs ("many Americans" versus the statists and their media allies) and placing them in the network's larger narrative of social struggle (a fight for "freedom" against a "top-down society"). In contrast, for Fox News's major competitor CNN, the "news is the star" as founder Ted Turner frequently insists, meaning the news event, all the information, footage, and updates about it, is the central focus of the broadcast, so much so that information is to

an extent fetishized in the representational universe of CNN. Fox News's editorial agenda differs from traditional news outlets and its cable news rivals because it is organized more by its own founding narrative and long-term thematic structure than by "breaking news" and the short-term news cycle.⁵⁶ On the surface, the origin narrative continually repeated by Fox News executives and commentators seems to rely solely on discourses of partisanship, journalism and commercialism. According to CEO Roger Ailes, Fox News became a successful news organization because it recognized an untapped market for conservative news viewers and gave voice to—in a liberal democratic sense—a previously "underserved" group of Americans (Auletta, 2003; LA Times, 1995). Indicative of its slogan "fair and balanced," Fox's founding narrative also claims that the network's entrance into the news scene affirmed journalistic values because it "restored objectivity," using Ailes' words, by serving as a counterpoint to the so-called liberal bias of the "establishment media." In turn, this story of liberal bias builds off of a story major conservative politicians have referenced as a rhetorical staple since Richard Nixon, a man Ailes once served as a political strategist and media consultant.

Underlying this narrative, the liberal media is always implicitly and sometimes explicitly framed as serving 'the elites,' while Fox News is presented as a champion of 'the people.' The Fox News audience is consistently discussed as "the American people" and described as the popular majority of the nation with the terms like "middle America," "the heartland," and "the working-class." The presence of these signifiers and

⁵⁶ Two recent articles looking at The O'Reilly Factor, Fox News's number one show, have also made this observation noting the ways in which Fox News's editorial agenda is not as beholden to the traditional news cycle as network news outlets (Peters, 2011; Norton, 2011). These authors suggest, as I do, that on Fox News's top shows the newness of the "breaking news story" is less important than whether or not the short term news topic suits long term story structures, motifs, archetypes, and themes. However, both these authors give no historical sense of where these story structures and tropes come from.

their antagonistic framing reflects how Fox News's founding narrative synthesizes the political language of populism with journalistic modes of rhetoric about objectivity, public service and balance. In addition, because Fox News's self-narrative is threaded with the longer established populist narrative of the postwar conservative movement, coverage of day-to-day political events on Capitol Hill are represented as part of a much grander and more enduring political war. Policies events and elections are represented as individual manifestations of an epochal political struggle between the people and 'the folks,' between conservative values and liberal values. This populist framing of daily political events has a closer resemblance to a hegemonic conceptualization of political struggle than to an electoral or liberal-democratic conception that Fox's centrist and liberal counterparts in the news media more commonly express in their political analysis of the same day-to-day events.

This chapter outlines the key components of Fox News's populist representational system and develops a framework for interpreting and deconstructing it. In the first section of this chapter, I demonstrate how Fox News's populist narrative and antagonistic meaning structure informs its representation of the political public sphere so that the media field is projected as an arena divided between two rival publics and media infrastructures, one elite and one popular. Here, I show how Fox News's assumption of a popular voice and authority is achieved in two interrelated ways, one) by constantly presenting the network as occupying an anti-establishment position in the journalism community and two) by continually positioning the network and all conservatives against a powerful elite. In defining the conservative political identity by a common outsider status and by a common opposition to an elite media system and social bloc, Fox News programming is able to consolidate the disparate factions, identities, and symbols

associated with political conservatism and attach them to one singular populist signifier: ‘the people.’

In the first section, I outline the most basic formal qualities of Fox News’s populist address, its rhetorical skeleton sort of speak, however, in the second section of this chapter I demonstrate how Fox News’s conception of ‘the people’ is given a more palpable quality through being associated with the white working-class. Without the establishment and constant reiteration of this class association, Fox News’s conservative populist identity—the way it stands for the popular majority and the disenfranchised—would not have the same moral punch and credibility it has enjoyed.⁵⁷ However, Fox News’s representation of the working-class differs from left-wing versions of working-class populism in that it emphasizes the dimensions of class dealing with taste and educational differences as opposed to income and occupational differences. To identify the cultural logic underlying Fox News’s representation of working-class taste, I utilize sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of class. To understand how Fox News’s programming frames class-cultural differences as political differences, I utilize Ernesto Laclau’s theory of populism. Synthesizing the concepts of these theorists, I call discourses that represent a working-class taste culture through a populist mode of address “cultural populism.” In this section, I develop a theoretical framework for understanding how Fox News’s employment of cultural populist discourse translates the political logic of populism into a class-cultural logic and vice versa.

⁵⁷ This is not to suggest that populist modes of representation require a connection with the working-class or any other majority social group. Unlike *organizational populism* that does tend to involve the grassroots mobilization of mass and/or non-elite segments of a given population, *representational populism* can be used by elite and non-elite social factions alike. Most often “the people” that is articulated by populist discourse refers to, on the ground, a composite of various social groups and classes and select factions of the social elite and is, looking at the historic usage of populist discourse, seldom confined to a specific socioeconomic class.

In last section, I discuss the two central ways in which cultural populism gives Fox News's construction of 'the people' and its anti-establishment positionality in the media field a class-cultural texture. First, I discuss the central role that the hosts play in Fox News overarching populist representational system. Here, I argue that the top hosts' *performance* of a working-class cultural disposition is the primary way in which the network's class-cultural address is established. This disposition is partly performed by the hosts' frequent lifestyle references but is more fundamentally communicated by levels of emotional expression and the types of analytical modes Fox News's top hosts display and assume in the midst of discussion and debate. In the second part of this section, I contextualize Fox News's popular cultural address by situating it in the broader historical tension between the 'popular press' and the 'prestige press' that has existed in the American news media since the days of the penny press. Here, I briefly discuss the ways in which Fox News's has incorporated stylistic elements of "lowbrow" public affairs genres such tabloid news papers and daytime talk shows to establish its association with popular taste and I analyze how Fox News's marketing discourse also works to reinforce its alignment with working-class taste and its distance from 'prestige' news outlets. In the end, I demonstrate how Fox News's deployment of cultural populism works to attach different class-cultural dispositions to the elite and populist positionalities that make up the network's vision of the media and the political arena.

Counter-elite Journalism

The most basic formal quality of populist modes of representation is the act of naming 'the people.' From its inception, Fox News has marketed itself as a network for the popular masses or what Michael Kazin calls a 'counter-elite.' This representational

practice is particularly visible in earlier episodes of Fox News's second most successful show, *Hannity*, then called *Hannity & Colmes*.⁵⁸ In a 2001 segment, Sean Hannity and guest, conservative talk radio host Mike Gallagher discuss the Fox News/talk radio audience as a popular social bloc. Mike Gallagher states, "the heartland really, really yearns for conservative voices because, for years, the mainstream press is dominated by liberal weenies like my friend here to the left." The geographic signifier of "the heartland" has been one of the key signifiers of the 'the people' throughout the history of US populist discourse.⁵⁹ Gallagher describes the people of the "heartland" as being excluded from the official political channels, in this case "the mainstream press," the political channel and elite position of power *par excellence* in Fox News's representational universe. Following Gallagher's populist framing, moments later in the discussion host Sean Hannity tells a liberal guest, "you guys on the left — you want to take too much of the hardworking people and this audience's money" (4/27/2001).⁶⁰ Again, the audience is described by a signifier conveying a popular social bloc: "the hardworking people." And Gallagher reinforces this framing stating, "Sean, you hit the nail on the head...that's what our core is. We play to middle America, and middle America has been looking for talk radio and people like Rush and Sean [Hannity] for years." Fox News is repeatedly aligned with signifiers that convey a popular identity ("the

⁵⁸ From 1996 to January 2009, Hannity's program included a liberal counterpart Alan Colmes and was called for most of the program's history *Hannity & Colmes*. In January of 2009, the show became exclusively hosted by Sean Hannity and the program's name was changed to just *Hannity*. The majority of this show's programming I analyze in this study looks primarily at the program after Colmes left.

⁵⁹ However, regional appeals and signifiers that were so central to Fox News's populist mode of address during the Bush era assume a marginal position in the conservative chain of equivalences during the Recession. See (Taggart, 2000; Johnson, 2008).

⁶⁰ Foreshadowing to chapter three, the producerist narrative of theft and taxpayer victimization is expressed in Hannity's statement here demonstrating the discourse's presence in Fox News programming long before the Recession.

heartland,” “hardworking Americans,” and “middle America”).

In time of this broadcast in 2001, Fox News, while on the heels of CNN in the cable news ratings competition, had a much more marginal position in the US news media than it does today thus Fox News’s assertion about having an outsider status and its narrative about being “dominated” by the “liberal-mainstream media” held more weight in a political economic sense. Fast-forward to the closing years of the 2000s, Fox News has not only surpassed CNN in ratings but also gained a larger audience than all of its cable news competitors combined. In terms of its dominant economic position in the U.S. news industry and considering the international success of FNC’s parent company News Corp, Fox News *is* a media powerhouse. Interestingly, however, the great commercial and political strides that the network has made in the last sixteen years hasn’t lead Fox News to abandon or fundamentally alter its basic populist narrative.

Looking at segment that aired on November 15, 2010 where Bill O’Reilly and the guest panel respond to a sound bite of veteran network anchor Ted Koppel in which Koppel suggests that cable news is degrading modern journalism, ones see the invocation of similar populist signifiers and elite antagonists that one sees in the older *Hannity & Colmes* clip. In one moment of the discussion, O’Reilly says that he doesn’t “understand Koppel’s beef.” Guest panelist Ellis Henican responds saying, “Nobody gives up a monopoly willingly. It’s a whole lot more fun when you run the whole street.” Here, Henican names the establishment elite with the term “monopoly” and, with his reference to this group wanting to “run the whole street,” suggests the existence of a power struggle to control the journalistic-political field, a struggle that the old guard journalists in the liberal media are now, after decades of dominance, losing thanks to Fox News. Using a more combative tone and more histrionic language, Tammy Bruce,

the other guest panelist in segment, echoes Henican's anti-elitist rhetoric but goes further and names O'Reilly and the panelists as members of the popular bloc. She says, "Look, this is about the elitist snobbery, the monarchy have to realize and not liking the fact that barbarians and peasants have taken over. We're the commoners, you guys. That's a thing they can't stand. I mean, it's happened to politics and it's happening here." With a smirk on his face, O'Reilly responds in a tongue and cheek tone, "Tammy and Ellis is right on it. If there ever were a barbarian taking over you are looking at him."

Here, near the end of Bruce's comments and in O'Reilly response, one sees not only the act of naming the Fox News audience as the popular bloc but actually claiming that Fox News hosts and guests are members of this imagined community as well ("we're the commoners"). In juxtaposing a past segment with a more contemporary one, one can see the ways in which Fox's populist narrative has both stayed the same in last ten years and how it has changed in order to account for the network's political economic ascendancy. While rhetoric that paints Fox News as being "dominated" and marginalized by the "liberal-mainstream media" is still very much present in the late-2000s, one also sees in the contemporary moment newer elements of the narrative, elements that contradict discourses of political marginalization and instead stress Fox News's centrality in the journalistic field and its ability to match and sometimes even surpass the political influence of 'elite' media outlets. This is evidenced in Bruce's statements about how Fox has "taken over" or by O'Reilly's earlier claim in the discussion that Fox has "eclipsed some of the traditional news agencies [i.e. network news outlets] as far as influence is concerned."

While post-ascendancy discourses on Fox News frames the network as a force that has weakened the media elite either by giving voice to the once silent popular

masses or by neutralizing the media elite's ability to corrupt the general public ideologically, the media elite is framed as still having the power to marginalize "the people" politically via its greater social proximity to and cultural ties with other institutional elites namely—following the common list of conservative enemies—government, courts, academia, entertainment and the arts. Following the populist framework, the political public sphere is represented as a dichotomized terrain that consists of two dueling media systems and divergent communities of social consent: one popular and one elite. Each is associated with different sources of cultural authority, as I'll elaborate on in the next chapter. This populist conceptualization of the public sphere stands in contrast to the unitary conception of the news media that characterized the 'high-modern' journalism of the 1940s-1980s network era (Hallin, 1992). Its dualistic character also differs from how media scholars describe the contemporary multichannel era and its 'postmodern paradigm' of journalism that envisions the public sphere as a multi-voiced, "montage of publics" (Hauser, 1999; Baym, 2010). What is most significant about Fox News's populist vision of the political public sphere, however, is not simply its binary quality, but rather how its deployment of populist binaries projects a tacit theory about how the news media is involved in political-social struggle and the perpetuation of social hierarchy. Lastly, this dichotomized conception of the media field also offers Fox News a rationale by which the network can be seen as both an institutional outsider losing the battle to attain "official" legitimacy in the eyes of the journalism community and other elite cultural institutions and as a political and media juggernaut winning the battle for popular consent.

This is exemplified in a "Factor Follow Up" segment on *The O'Reilly Factor*, where one of Fox News's favorite political targets and villains, the *New York Times*, is

the main topic of discussion. The segment begins with host, Bill O'Reilly explaining how the *Times* is a biased, ideological paper with a "liberal editorial philosophy." He then introduces author, William McGowan, and his book about the *Times* titled *Gray Lady Down*. O'Reilly begins the interview with a blunt question: "a lot of my viewers watching tonight are thinking look, we don't read the *Times*, we don't like the *Times*...why should they read your book, why should they care or we care what they [*New York Times*] do over there." Here, one sees how O'Reilly sets up the framework for the subsequent discussion that, from the beginning, serves to position the *Times* as outside of the realm of popular legitimacy. In the exchange that follows one sees how the elite and popular positions in the journalistic-political field are rhetorically established.

McGowan: Like or not the *New York Times* is the most important media outlet in America.

O'Reilly: Why, let me stop you there, it's more important than Fox News?

McGowan: I would say in certain policy circles, yes.

O'Reilly: are you talking about the Democratic Party?

McGowan: Yeah of course the Democratic Party, but in terms of serious policy circles when the times comes out on something there a lot of people who will jump on that herd, jump on that bandwagon.

O'Reilly: Are they politicians, business people, because they're not the folks, the folks don't care about the *New York Times*.

McGowan: I would say the policy elite.

O'Reilly: that means people in Washington, people in state government.

McGowan: Yes, people in New York, people in state government.

O'Reilly: so decision makers, elected judges, things like that they still read the paper and take some cues from it?

McGowan: Oh absolutely. (11/15/2010)

In the representational system of Fox News programming, the *New York Times* has played and continues to play a crucial symbolic function of embodying the elite pole of the journalistic and political field and, as I'll show later, it works as a useful symbol for professional class tastes and aesthetics as well. As depicted in this segment, it is a news

outlet legitimated by elite groups: “serious policy circles,” “Washington,” “New York,” and “the decision makers.” As the center and paragon of the elite media, McGowan’s assertion that the *New York Times* is “the most important media outlet in America” reestablishes the power of the antagonistic camp in Fox’s broader populist framework and thus maintains Fox News’s underdog status.

Returning to the contradiction between this underdog status and Fox News’s dominant position in the news industry, O’Reilly contests McGowan’s claim that the *New York Times* is the most important national media outlet and suggests that Fox News deserves that title instead. This contestation over which media outlet is most important implicitly suggests the existence of two competing sources of legitimacy and power in the political-journalistic field. The subsequent discussion gives the viewer a better sense of the nature of these sources and how Fox News and the *New York Times* align with them. In interpreting McGowan’s description of the *New York Times*’ primary source of political influence (“serious policy circles”), O’Reilly throws out various guesses about who this is: “are we talking about the Democratic Party...politicians, business people.” In this haphazard fashion he attempts to label the political address of *New York Times* and with his uncertain tone, presents the newspaper’s source of social legitimacy as dubious, esoteric, and inscrutable like elite political influence itself. In contrast, O’Reilly is definitive in stating the political and cultural community with whom the *New York Times* has no legitimacy: “the folks.”

In this exchange, one sees how Fox News constructs its counter-elite brand by presenting itself and conservatives as perpetual outsiders to the political establishment, a position given new life in 2008 when Democratic Party won the presidency with the election of president Barack Obama. Noting this characteristic about Fox News’s

programming, in his condescendingly titled article “Dumb like a Fox” (2010), Terry McDermott writes, “there’s a loopy self-absorption to this [Fox’s anti-elitism] that is peculiar to Fox and that derives from its origin narrative as the network for the unrepresented, for the outsiders” (p. 8). While McDermott points to a fundamental component of Fox News’s rhetorical style, he doesn’t fully recognize the ideological purpose this “outsider” frame serves and how smart it is in political terms. By framing a common opposition to the liberal elite and by stressing the common exteriority of all conservatives to the channels of cultural prestige and political power, Fox News programming can obscure internal contradictions and the tensions *within* the conservative movement.⁶¹ It is through assuming this anti-elite and anti-establishmentarian posture that Fox News programming discourse coheres the conservative political subject into a singular identity and, more implicitly, it is what facilitates the network’s ability to delimit, constrain, and exert control over what it means to be a conservative.⁶²

In addition to this function, the constant reiteration of this anti-establishment positionality works to convey the idea that Fox News, in having an exterior status and

⁶¹ For example, even though the radicalism of the Schumpeterian creative-destruction logic at the heart of neoclassical economic theory and Reaganomics is in direct conflict with the Burkean tradition of conservatism whose fundamental project is to “conserve” traditional ways of life, this contradiction is masked by positioning these two strains of conservatism against an intrusive liberal statist elite. In his book *Caught in the Crossfire* (2005), Larry Grossberg highlights and elaborates on the tension between Burkean conservatism and the more radical, neoliberal ideological elements of what he calls “new conservatism” (pp. 132-34). Long ago, mid-twentieth-century scholars such as Theodor Adorno and Richard Hofstadter recognized this tension when they called the conservative populists of the era “pseudo-conservatives.” These scholars referred to them as “pseudo,” because the conservative populists deny their radicalism while pretending to “conserve” tradition as Burkean conservatism stresses.

⁶² In their book *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (2012), Vanessa Williamson and Theda Skocpol note that while Fox News “boosts” the Republican Party giving it an immense publicity apparatus, it also “buffets” the Party as well. They maintain that the core tensions that exist between Fox News and the Republican Party arise from the way in which Fox News exerts an ideological regulation over the party, pressuring the “the official Republican Party” not from the center, but “from the right” (p. 123-124).

distance from the elite media, also has a special distance from its corrupt quality. Thus, this anti-establishmentarian discourse also works to give Fox News a level of moral purity, a moral purity its competitors in news industry, in being supposedly far more intimate with the political class and other elites, cannot claim. As I will discuss in detail in chapter three and four, this relates to another key characteristic of populist representational modes that Fox News's mode of address exhibits, which is the notion that societal institutions have lost their commitment to "traditional values" and 'the folks.' Because 'the folks' are said to exist outside of these institutions, they are framed as the last repository of traditional values and therefore as the primary agent for their restoration (Taggart, 2000; Canovan, 1981).

Establishing a Singular Populist Subject

Unlike Fox News' homogenous construction of conservatism and *the* conservative, on the ground the conservative movement is heterogeneous and encompasses a wide array of political factions, social groups, ideologies and symbols that inevitably contradict each other to different extents. However, in the process of positioning the plurality of divergent identities and political signifiers toward a common opposition to an elite-institutional 'Other,' the plurality of elements in the conservative movement become situated within an overarching constellation of political signs and affiliations that Ernesto Laclau calls a "chain of equivalences." This 'chain' momentarily glosses over the differences and contradictions between the constitutive parts and establishes, always precariously, a singular image of the populist conservative.

For more than a half of century, the postwar conservative movement has done the difficult work of quilting different identities, subcultures and issues together so that

today issues like gun control, religion and free market economics seem to be naturally associated. In addition, in Fox News programming the divergent identity groups that make up the imagined conservative political community have appeared along side each other within and across Fox News programs so frequently and for so long that each signifier and identity—even when cited in isolation—can invoke other issues and identities on the chain. The ‘chain’ and the populist signifier of O’Reilly’s term ‘the folks’ supersedes and homogenizes the distinctive quality of each of the various identities and political demands attached to it. Forming a symbolic system, the conservative ‘chain’ of political signs has established a logic and political thrust such that not even the conservative movement itself or Fox News has full control over it. However, Fox News’ populist mode of address plays a crucial role in recreating and reinforcing this chain of political associations.

One sees this process of quilting divergent identities together in a “talking points memo” segment on *The Factor* where the topic of discussion is, “why the far left thinks America is a dumb country.” Host Bill O’Reilly says to his guests, “the far left elitists portray any populist as a bumpkin....If you are pro-choice, you’re a bumpkin. Okay? If you go to church, you’re an idiot.” Reinforcing this frame, guest panelists Naomi Wolf ties gun ownership to religion stating, “on the far left...there is an instinct to talk down to people.” O’Reilly interjects, “that’s right.” Wolf continues, “you know, if you have a gun, if you go to church, there’s this assumption you’re not smart” (7/30/2009). In a *Hannity* segment, where the topic of discussion is the “bitter-gate” controversy that emerged during the 2008 presidential campaign, Hannity suggests that Obama “sounds like a snob” and then aligns a regional signifier to the signifiers just cited in the previous *The*

Factor segment.⁶³ He states, “he [Barack Obama] is saying to small-town America that they are a bunch of gun-toting, bible-thumping bigots” (4/11/2008). In these quotes, one see how some of the core identity groups that comprise the imagined conservative community are coupled together and discussed in manner as to present their political unity as a given. Similar rhetorical patterns are found in the construction of the liberal “Other” as well. In a segment debating the “unfair” coverage by the “establishment media” of Sarah Palin, Hannity asks rhetorically, “Is this about the “inside the beltway” mentality? The New York- Hollywood mentality?” (7/6/2009). Here, the reoccurring stock of elite factions that comprise Fox News’s vision of the liberal power bloc—the political class, the media, coastal elites, and the hip and trendy—are sequenced side by side in order to establish their symbolic equivalence and political alliance.

As in many other episodes, pro-choice, rural, and gun-owning Americans are regularly sequenced together, suggesting that the unity of the conservative political identity is simply achieved by the constant repetition of these associations on a nightly basis. While the mere coupling and sequencing of these identity groups on a continual basis plays a role, the crux of how these identity groups become semantically glued together is how Fox News programming commonly positions them against an elite, antagonistic camp. As opposed to simply inundating the viewer with slick associations, these examples from O’Reilly and Hannity do in fact give the viewer a rationale for why divergent groups have a social similarity and political unity: they are equal objects of the “far left’s” derision and condescension (e.g. “you’re a bumpkin” and a “bigot”).

Above, one sees how the thematic content of this populist framing is centered on

⁶³ “Bittergate” refers to a gaffe candidate Obama made during the 2008 presidential campaign where he told an audience at a San Francisco fundraiser that the working-class are “bitter” and “cling to their guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren’t like them.”

the ever-present theme of cultural elitism. However, even when the thematic components of Fox News populist framework change, as when, during the Recession, the moral-economic discourse of producerism assumed a more face forward position in Fox News programming, the same representational techniques and oppositional framing are applied. For example, in chapter three and four I demonstrate how Fox News's top programs represent the working-class and the business class as being part of the same political-economic faction (i.e. "the productive people of the private sector") by framing the government as a force that victimizes both groups through taxation and the welfare system. Writing about this quality of populism, Francisco Panizza asserts, it is "the oppressor [that] simultaneously renders all of them 'the same'"(6).⁶⁴

Fox News's populist representation of the political-journalistic field is fundamentally different from that of its competitors in the national news media. While

⁶⁴ Kathleen Jamieson and Joseph Cappella (2008) note this representational technique for creating a unified conservative identity through framing a common opposition to 'the liberal elite' across the conservative media establishment (pp. 59-74). However, they do not situate this representational technique in light of the broader populist tradition and thus make it seem as if it is something unique to modern conservative politics.

On another note, the process of articulation via framing a common opposition is not without its complications. Inevitably some political demands attached to the chain go unmet or become marginalized in the broader hegemonic project as evident by the Reagan Revolutions' failure to give the Christian Right, a voting bloc that was crucial to its ascendancy, any significant policy victories. Not being able to meet and equally represent all the various demands and identities that constitute a given chain leaves the chain perpetually unstable. As I'll demonstrate in later chapters, in the Great Recession era, Fox News had to modify the conservative chain of equivalence in order to protect it from being disarticulated and dismantled. In a historical moment where anti-corporate sentiments were widespread, Fox News created a dichotomy of "good capitalism" and "bad capitalism" using crony capitalism rhetoric. As I will explain in chapter three, this brand of rhetoric criticizes corporate-government collusions and corporate welfare. By incorporating crony capitalism rhetoric and/or giving it a more frontward position in Fox News programming discourse, Fox News could tap anti-corporate anger but divert it from the private sector and reroute it toward the government. However, this inclusion created internal contradictions and posed and still poses potential risks for the broader conservative coalition. The mid-2011 debt-ceiling stand off brought these tensions to light when the newly elected Tea Party members of the Republican House of Representatives were willing, in the name of free market ideological purity, to let the United States government default on sovereign debt. The establishment Republicans, who are more deeply connected to Wall Street, supported raising the debt on the basis that it would hurt Wall Street thus revealing Wall Street's dependency on and interconnectedness with the government.

traditional news outlets represent the political world as a conflictive one, its vision of the political field lacks the dualistic quality of populism and instead presents the political field as a competition between an almost limitless array of social factions and interest groups. In presenting the national political community as split by a master social division, Fox News populist conception of political public sphere lacks both the pluralistic quality of liberal democracy and its universal conception of the national political subject. The conservative audience is named the 'people' but this does not symbolize the entire population like the citizen-subject of high modern journalism. Instead, the conservative community is represented as a faction of the political community. Yet, rather than being presented as an interest group amongst a myriad of others, this faction, the Fox News audience, is represented as the *ideal* majority, the moral center of the nation.

Following Fox News's populist conception of the political field, the logic that undergirds the network's representation of the conservative political identity is fundamentally different from how the liberal political identity is represented by both Fox and other news outlets. The representation of the liberal identity follows liberal democracy's conception of the political subject because it is founded on, following Laclau, a "logic of difference" (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001; Laclau 2005; 2007). In a liberal-democratic imaginary the communal tie that each political actor shares with other actors is their universal right to have and politically advance their mutual *differences* and individuality. One sees this logic today in the representation of the Democratic Party and/or the liberal political identity, where what brings the coalition together is their common celebration of diversity or defense of the right to be different. In contrast, Fox News constructs the conservative political subject as a populist subject, which is underpinned by a 'logic of equivalence.' Having a populist, equivalential logic, Fox News

establishes the communal cohesion of the conservative coalition by stressing the mutual *sameness* of the actors involved, sameness that is established via a common opposition to an antagonistic camp.⁶⁵ Rather than accentuating the differences and particularities within the conservative movement, the tendency in Fox News's construction of the conservative political identity is to condense the differences within the conservative political community in order to establish and embrace a singular identity. Adopting the conceptual framework of liberal-democracy, centrist and liberal media outlets approach politics and social turmoil as a problem that can be solved by reforming political institutions, making them more functional, responsive, and inclusive (Laclau 2005, pp. 166-167). In contrast, Fox News's populist framework and political mode of address suggests that only by defeating and vanquishing the elite faction that corrupts such institutions can communitarian fullness and a moral social order be achieved (Laclau 2005, p. 111; 2007, pp. 36-46). Where the communal tie for political liberalism is established by the equal inclusion of *all* individuals to the institutions that grant and facilitate political sovereignty and representation, Fox News's conservative populist bloc is cohered and brought together by its common (imagined or real) *exteriority* to and marginalization by those same institutions.

⁶⁵ No doubt, one can attribute the differences in the conservative political logic and the liberal political logic by pointing to the difference demographic compositions of their respective coalitions. The conservative movement is more or less racially homogeneous and thus its tendency toward a populist representationally logic could be seen as simply a product of its nationalistic, white majoritarian politics, a brand of politics it most fully embraced after the Civil Rights movement made its greatest policy gains. Conversely, the Democratic left's tendency toward a liberal-democratic subject could be seen as a product of its more racially diverse coalition. While there is great truth to this line of thinking, it leads one down the path of assuming that what really matters when evaluating the success of Fox News and the right's brand of politics is the built-in advantages the conservative movement has by demographics or by corporate backing, therefore, the representational techniques it deploys to win popular consent are fairly simplistic and accomplish essentially an easy task. In the conclusion, I will explain why reducing—as many on the left tend to do—the success of conservative populism to white majoritarianism is reductive and politically problematic.

A Theoretical Framework for Understanding the Class Politics of Fox News

In the previous sections, I outlined the basic rhetorical components of Fox News's populist representational structure. However, by itself the populist signifier of 'the folks' is too vague and abstract to have substantial meaning. In order to anchor Fox News's populist vision of itself, the media and American politics to the concrete social world, Fox News's populist address includes ongoing efforts to solidify the relationship between political conservatism and the white working class. This association finds social basis in a white working-class that has—since Richard Nixon in 1972 through John McCain in 2008—primarily voted Republican.⁶⁶ It is also grounded in demographics as nearly 70% of Fox News's audience lacks a college degree.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ See (Brady et al, 2009). For voting data on the 2008 election see, CNN. (2008, November). *Election Center 2008*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#USP00p1>. In addition, Fox News's construction of the conservative political community as the popular majority is buttressed as well by the numerical majority of Americans who identify as conservative over liberal. A 2012 Gallup study titled, "Conservatives Remain the Largest Ideological Group in U.S" (2012) shows that, compared to the 35% of Americans who describe their views as moderate and the 21% who identify as liberal, the majority of Americans (40%) describe their views as conservative. Interestingly, it has been in the years of the Great Recession that, for the third straight year, conservatives have outnumbered moderates. This after more than a decade in which moderates mainly matched or outnumbered conservatives. See Saad, L. (2012, January) Conservatives Remain the Largest Ideological Group in U.S. *Gallup Politics*. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/152021/conservatives-remain-largest-ideological-group.aspx>.

⁶⁷ According to Nielsen Media Research's third quarter analysis of 2009, the median household income of Fox News viewers is \$53,000 a year and 30.2% percent of Fox News viewers completed at least 4 years of college compared with 36.5% and 37.5 for MSNBC. See Berr, J. (2011, January). After Olbermann, Is Comcast Set to Overhaul MSNBC? Don't Bet on It. *DailyFinance*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailyfinance.com/2011/01/24/after-olbermann-is-comcast-set-to-overhaul-msnbc-dont-bet-on/>. Also see Cabletelevision Advertising Bureau. (2009). *Fox News Channel Profile*. Retrieved from http://www.thecab.tv/php/networkprofiles/10profileData/10_pdf/10Fox%20News%20Channel.pdf. A Pew study showed that only 22 percent of Fox News's audience had graduated from college, a much a lower percentage than Nielsen's numbers. See (Pew Research Center, 2007). Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/319.pdf>. Therefore, Fox News median viewer's educational level is below the national average and the viewer's income matches the national median household income, which is at 51,914 according to the U.S. Census Bureau. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html>. This median household income statistic, like

However, setting aside the material referents, what hasn't been thoroughly examined is how Fox News's top programs attempt to give the conservative populist subject a *class*

most income-based statistics, doesn't tell us much about the class origins of the majority of Fox News's audience nor does it reveal Fox News's audience's subjective class identification. Because the bulk of Fox News's audience is in the 40 to 60-age range—the median viewer being sixty-two—this means that majority are at the peak earning period of many worker's lifespan. However, the majority of the audience does not have nor are they likely to have in the future a college education.

Many studies that have looked at the relationship between political affiliation and class identity have defined working-class as being those without a college degree, in which case the large majority of the Fox News's audience would be considered working-class (Teixeira and Rogers, 2001; Brady et al, 2009; Frank 2004). However, if one defines working class as those households that make less than 35,000 dollars a year or are in the bottom third of the national income distribution as Princeton political scientist Larry Bartels has done in his research on class and political affiliation, then the majority of Fox News's audience is not working-class as well as the majority of the Republican voting base. See Bartels, Larry. (2006). What's the Matter with What's the Matter with Kansas?. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 1(2), 201-26. Retrieved from <http://www.princeton.edu/~bartels/kansas.pdf>. However, as Frank points out in a rejoinder to Bartels, this definition of working class means that over a third of the working-class are retirees, 8% are disabled, a third are unemployed, and half are under the age of thirty, a highly problematic view of the average rank and file wage worker and household to say the least. Frank points out that the benefits of defining class by college education is that, unlike by quintile income brackets, a college degree predicts long-term life chances. See Frank, T. Class is Dismissed. Retrieved from <http://userwww.service.emory.edu/~dlinzer/Frank-ClassDismissd.pdf>. In contrast, people tend to move in and out of the bottom third income bracket at the beginning and end of adulthood (e.g. young workers, college students and retirees). Defining class by college education has its problems especially in the post-Recession economy when the unemployment rate amongst college graduates has skyrocketed (it is still far worse for those with no college degrees). Nevertheless, I still find the college education metric more persuasive than Bartel's definition especially considering that college education is not only related to income and the labor market but is also tied to class taste and cultural capital as well thus indicating a more comprehensive sense of class. According to Bartel's definition of the working-class, most Ph.D. students can be defined as working-class, while middle-to-older aged nurses or UAW auto-workers that have built up seniority and pay raises in a company for decades can be defined as affluent. Still, because of their middle-to-upper income tax filing standing, it is fair to debate the working-class identity of Fox News's audience, but I think it is safe to describe Fox News's audience as overwhelmingly lower-middle-class and as being comprised of people who are not, as individuals, economically and politically powerful or exceptional. Lastly, however, it is necessary to point out the flawed logic in this whole endeavor to deny or verify the class standing of Fox News's audience with statistics because it assumes one can evaluate the association between Fox News/the Republican Party and working-class identity on the basis of whether or not there is a one-to-one empirical relationship between them, as if class identity is exclusively a matter of economics and material conditions and lacks no symbolic, cultural or subjective dimension. This strictly empirical and/or orthodox Marxist mode of analysis also fails to see how class identity is, as theorist such as Stuart Hall and Ernesto Laclau stress, *constituted* through partisan identities in the arena of political and ideological struggle. For these reasons, populist discourse and political media are extremely important to any study of class in the United States.

substance through their programming style, that is, how, at the textual and performative level, the network constructs and reinforces the symbolic linkages between the working-class and the Republican Party. As reflected in the language used to describe the conservative working-class subject and Fox News's populist style, class is primarily discussed as a cultural identity as opposed to an economic one. In interviews, Ailes, O'Reilly, and Murdoch often used terms like "personality," "edge" and "authenticity" to signal the working-class cultural identity the network exudes.⁶⁸ In the programming itself, the working-class identity of the conservative audience or the host is often described as a "sensitivity," a "disposition," or as "ordinary."

To understand how Fox News's populist address represents class as a cultural identity I turn to the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. In his classic book *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu theorizes social classes as cultural groups or what he terms "taste cultures." In his comparative analysis of working-class and professional class taste cultures, Bourdieu's research sheds light on the dispositional and aesthetic elements of class identity. I argue that Bourdieu's work is useful for analyzing Fox News's representation of class because it is primarily through aesthetic and dispositional modes of expression that class identifications are made. Bourdieu argues that working-class taste is guided by the "principle of conformity" meaning it is oriented toward cultural products that *conform* to the 'popular aesthetic' and celebrate "homogeneous experience and social collectivity" (p. 381). Bourdieu argues that amongst the working classes and factions of the middle-class, there is no greater sin than for a member to act, dress, and speak as if they were something "special." When a member of the working-class strives

⁶⁸ In the country music industry, an industry significantly tied to Fox News and the conservative movement, the term "authenticity" is often used as a synonym for cultural characteristics (e.g. language, mannerisms, knowledge) that display the singer's working-class roots. See (Peterson, 1997).

to culturally distinguish him or herself this is seen as both a threat to class solidarity and as a repudiation of the group. Bourdieu writes, “the son of a bourgeois who breaks with his family is favourably regarded [and praised for being an individual], whereas a worker’s son who does the same thing is condemned” (p. 381). I find that Bourdieu’s concept of the principle of conformity resembles the logic behind Fox News’s construction of working-class culture and helps explain the representational purpose behind Fox News’s top hosts’ repeated praise of common taste and their systematic repudiation of educated and/or hip culture, i.e. cultural forms that express, using Bourdieu’s terminology, the bourgeois “principle of distinction.”

Notably, the conforming logic of the working-class cultural aesthetic—its tendency to celebrate cultural sameness over cultural difference—reinforces and works well with populist political discourse because it mirrors the equivalential logic of populism laid out by Laclau. In her book *Dignity of Working Men* (2000), Michelle Lamont’s research demonstrates how American workers see attempts to dress and talk uncommonly as ‘fake’ or ‘pretentious’ and shows how expressing anti-elitist attitudes and rejecting distinguishing cultural practices functions, itself, as an important way to express “class homophily” and signal one’s working-class membership (pp. 108-109).

However, there are limits to the applicability of Bourdieu’s class theory. Bourdieu’s Franco-centric class analysis is unable to address how elements of the Fox News’s construction of class are informed by national discourses and the particularity of American culture (Lamont, 1992; 2000).⁶⁹ For example, anti-elitist cultural attitudes are

⁶⁹ In her book on class and social hierarchy *The Dignity of Working Men* (2000), Michelle Lamont borrows from Bourdieu’s theory of class when comparing working-class communities in France and the United States. However, she also criticizes it for not addressing the ways in which national ‘cultural repertoires’ shape conceptions of class and class formations. Taking a “cultural-materialist” approach, Lamont maintains that class standards of in-group/out-group membership

more prevalent in the US than in France and American workers tend to contest education-based definitions of intelligence to a greater degree than their French counterparts (Lamont, 2000).⁷⁰ Bourdieu and other sociologists demonstrate that the

are not merely the product of structural, material conditions. They are also constructed and shaped by *national discourses*, which are diffused by national institutions like the educational system, the church, and the mass media (p. 9).

⁷⁰ In that American workers negatively view individuals who distance themselves from and do not conform to popular culture, Bourdieu's 'principle of conformity' applies to the American working-class. However, it seems to have less applicability to an American context when Bourdieu demonstrates how French workers generally tolerate a professional's tendency to culturally distinguish themselves. This is because, he argues, French workers see this tendency as deriving from the professional's 'nature' as opposed to being the result of domestic and educational processes of socialization. In her work, Lamont points out that while French workers tend to refute many of the middle class beliefs that American workers adhere to such as free market bootstrapism and labor-capital mutualism, French workers more readily accept the idea that they are intellectually and culturally inferior to those above them in the socio-technical and economic hierarchy. The reasons for this, she explains, is that higher education in France is more exclusive and elitist and, relying heavily on standardized testing, the French educational system as whole is more "efficient at legitimating [and naturalizing] social differences" (p. 220). As a result, Lamont argues that French workers and French professionals alike are more accepting of "cultural distinctions and cultural capital than their American counterparts" (p. 220).

In United States, however, the cultural repertoires of the working class, which Lamont associates with "populism," are more pervasive and thus have more legitimacy and political weight in the larger national culture. Lamont shows how America workers are more likely to see the cultural repertoires of the professional class as something cultivated and *constructed* by an elite educational experience. This greater awareness of how definitions of intelligence and "official culture" are social-institutional constructs is tied to the fact that higher education in United States has been partially democratized, especially between 1950-1970 (p. 220). In their book *The Academic Revolution* (1977), authors Christopher Jencks and David Riesman show that since as far back as the colonial era universities in the United States have been more accessible than in Great Britain and Europe. The great expansion of higher education in the 1960s was, while on a more humble scale, preceded by significant land grants and subsidies for the construction of state universities that were passed in the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890. Due to the partial massification of higher education and the presence of cultural populist discourse, American workers are more likely to reject the idea that their low social position is due to the lack of 'natural' intelligence. American workers and the non-college-educated middle-class not *only* stigmatize fellow workers for adopting un- or anti-popular cultural dispositions as their French counterparts do, they criticize their class superiors on same grounds. In the United States, even citizens making a bid for the presidency are evaluated by and subject to an anti-elitist gaze (e.g. presidential candidate John Kerry criticized for wind surfing, Barack Obama's language is too philosophical).

This isn't to say that U.S. culture is so thoroughly popular that the issue of cultural capital and categories of high and low culture have less or no social meaning as many postmodern theorists have suggested (Huysen, 1986; Jameson, 1991). On the contrary, I would argue that the instability and contested nature of definitions of good culture and intelligence make the differences between "the educated" and "the uneducated," between high and low culture far more politicized in American society. In the U.S., like in France, an elite education undeniably signifies

expression of class-cultural differences in everyday life rarely instigate inter-class hostilities (Bourdieu, 1984; Bettie 2002). However, in Fox News programming, class-cultural differences are articulated through populist discourses and, consequently, invoke oppositional relationships and take on political meaning.

When looking at the history of American populist discourse, one finds that class conflict has been a dominant theme in American politics for centuries. However, because populist schemas of class are highly flexible and ideologically inconsistent and tend to be more normative than empirical, populist class critiques are prematurely dismissed as irrational, incoherent or as not really class critiques at all (Hofstadter, 1965; 2008). This dismissal is often premised by an assumption that class identities are or should be direct reflections of economic conditions. However, over-materialist class analyses miss the crucial way in which class identities are forged by media constructions (Aronowitz, 1992, pp. 193-209), partisan identities (Wilentz, 1984) and through political struggle itself (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Laclau 1977, 2005; Hall, 1988). In his book *The Question of Class Struggle* (1982), sociologist Craig Calhoun maintains that historically class struggle has more often been waged in the name of the ‘people’—through populist political discourses—than in the name of the working-class. In turn, while the working-class is often at the center of the populist conception of the people, the popular social bloc that is referenced in populist discourse seldom refers to an exact,

both high social status and cultural authority. However, in the U.S., differing from France, the relationship between educational distinction and cultural superiority, between credential and innate intelligence, is constantly being interrogated and thus is perpetually unsettled. From this sociocultural tension, from the misalignment between those who have official, credential-based cultural authority and those who are perceived to have ‘authentic’ intelligence, a font of meaning undergirded by class resentment has fed American political culture since the colonial era. Ironically, the partial democratization of higher education has enhanced class-cultural tensions has opposed to naturalized and quelled them.

objective definition of the working-class and instead more often includes various class groups from within and without the proletariat.

Ernesto Laclau's theory of populism is useful because it highlights the constructive role that populist discourse plays in the formation of social blocs (i.e. loose conceptions of class groupings) and helps explain why informal, colloquial monikers of class such as 'the workers' or 'the fat cats' can be assigned to an array of different "objective" classes and serve different political projects in different historical moments. Following Laclau, I argue that the Fox News's populist representational strategy serves a hegemonic function by presenting its partisan imagination of 'the people' and 'the elites' as common sense and universal. However, in over-emphasizing how populist identities are constructed by macrological hegemonic structures and epochal shifts in political history, Laclau's analysis overlooks the equally important role that hegemonizing techniques play inside the political text or political performance. In an era where politics are primarily represented by the medium of television/video, these techniques do not merely work through verbal and word-based modes of communication. Today, political identities are hailed as much through aesthetic modes of expression and embodied performances as they are through political rhetoric. Laclau's work on populism largely overlooks how populist modes of representation involve much more subtle qualities such as the performance of particular cultural dispositions and epistemological orientations.

"I'm a blue-collar guy": Fox News Hosts as 'Class Performers'

The most important component of Fox News's attempt to give a class-cultural quality to its representation of the 'people' is through the Fox News host's *performance*

of a working-class cultural disposition.⁷¹ The host-centered format of Fox News's top shows is conducive to an effective cultural populist strategy because it is primarily driven by the accentuation and elaboration of the host's personality and life story.⁷² In his history of Fox News and CEO Roger Ailes' television career *Crazy like a Fox* (2004), Scott Collins describes the "guiding principle" of Ailes' programming philosophy writing, "great television means great *performances*, whether from a politician, an executive, or a talk-show host. People were the essence of the medium, the reason viewers watched in the first place" (p. 140).⁷³ And according to Ailes' his primary gift as a television producer is his ability, in his words, "to look for authenticity in people" (p. 140).

Journalism scholar John Corner (2000) has written about what he calls "mediated personas" in politics, how political figures, their public image and personality can symbolically "condense 'the political'" and stand in for an entire political ideology, political

⁷¹ In her ethnography of high school subcultures *Women Without Class* (2003), Julie Bettie makes the useful distinction between "class performativity" and "class performers" (pp. 49-56). Class performativity refers to the way in which an individual's actions and cultural expressions re-inscribe and re-instantiate a class identity that is a product of their material, objective location in the social structure. In contrast, Bettie describes a class performance as an attempt by an individual to emulate class-cultural dispositions and class-cultural forms of expression that are not of the individual's born class-cultural inheritance. Bettie reminds one that while it is more typical that class-origin-equals-class-performance, this is not always the case and that in the slippage between the objective and subjective moments of class reproduction there is room for class "passing," in both directions from working-class to upper class and vice versa. Drawing on Bettie's work, Laura Grindstaff stresses how when analyzing daytime television it becomes even more important to understand class as a performance and social script that guests and hosts play and follow (2002, p. 30). For more scholarship that explores looking at class identity as a performance see (Foley, 1990).

⁷² With exception to Glenn Beck, the other top hosts on Fox News, Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly, have been with the network for over a decade and thus Fox News viewers know them as familiar characters. In contrast, during the same period of time, CNN has not been able to offer its audience a similar cast of familiar characters because the network has frequently changed its anchors and programs. Larry King and the *Larry King Live* was an exception to this and, unsurprisingly, this show was the most successful program in CNN's history.

⁷³ Ailes' emphasis on and interest in performance is highlighted by the fact that in the early 1970s, Ailes had a stint as an off-Broadway producer producing both flops such as *Mother Earth* and *Ionescopade* and successes such as *Hot L Baltimore*. In fact, in 1973 Ailes won an Obie Award for the play *Hot L Baltimore* (Collins, 2004, p. 30).

system or even nation (p. 398). In the case of Fox News's top hosts, not only does the nightly performance of the host encapsulate Fox News's vision of political conservatism, it is the primary symbolic means for establishing the network's working-class sensibility. In one episode of *The O'Reilly Factor*, O'Reilly tells his guest, "I'm a blue-collar guy even though I'm wearing a green [dress] shirt tonight and I'm a rich guy, but I'm still that *sensibility*. You know that, Morris. You know me. All of my friends who are all blue collar, most of them say the same thing. "He [Obama] doesn't understand me and he doesn't care about me"" (10/6/2010). In this quote, O'Reilly makes a typical statement one would expect from a political commentator in saying the president doesn't understand ordinary Americans. However, what makes O'Reilly's rhetoric populist, what separates it from regular political speech and conventional journalism is that O'Reilly denies the social distance between himself and the audience and instead claims to be one of them on the basis of a shared class-cultural "sensibility."⁷⁴ News outlets and media figures that identify with traditional professional journalism claim to serve the people and *represent* their voice in a liberal-democratic way. However, well known, professional-minded journalists tend to be cognizant of their special status as major journalists and seldom attempt to *embody* the people in their writing and public personas

⁷⁴ The populist journalistic address used by Fox News's top hosts masks the representative relationship and seeks legitimacy by presenting the host as being one of the people, as being their virtual embodiment on television news. In his essay "Populism as the Internal Periphery of Democratic Politics" (2005), Benjamin Arditi points out that the *re-* in representative democracy alludes to the fact that the relationship between speaker (the political representative) and audience (the represented) is one-step removed. In contrast to traditional political modes of representation, a populist mode of address denies the "representational relationship all together" and seeks to express the notion of a "joint presence without representation," that is, a sense that the populist speaker is both a political leader and a member of the audience (pp. 82-83). In the context of Fox News's top programs, the star hosts consistently attempt to mask their high status role as television commentators so as to maintain an appearance of social and cultural equivalence with their audience.

and make the claim, as O'Reilly and other Fox News hosts do, that they are socially equivalent and identical to their audience.⁷⁵

In an interview with comedian and political commentator Jon Stewart, where O'Reilly describes his fellow Fox News commentator Glenn Beck as, "every man. He sits on a bar stool." Stewart interrupts O'Reilly and asks, "Every man has got a show?" Following Stewart's sentiment, it is easy to dismiss the Fox News host's claim to ordinariness by merely pointing out his high status as a television host, celebrity and exceptionally rich person. But what this type of critique overlooks is how the Fox News host's embodied performance and on-camera personality takes on a symbolic quality and functions as a stand in for the "real," as its analog in the world of television and politics. Writing about Bill O'Reilly's performance of a working-class cultural identity, *Salon.com* columnist Charles Pierce asserts, "it doesn't matter if Bill O'Reilly is really a blue-collar hero as long as he can play one on television" (para. 39). After all, Rocky Balboa is not a real person but proving this doesn't change the way this fictional character became and continues to stand as a dominant symbol of working-class identity in American popular culture. Likewise, regardless of the degree of artifice that Fox News's hosts' "everyman" performances entail and exhibit, what is important is how their

⁷⁵ On the contrary, many media outlets seeking professional esteem and public legitimacy accentuate the special political status and connections they have as top journalists, even while they stress their service to the people and democracy. This is exemplified in a recent 2011 MSNBC news promo. The commercial shows Chuck Todd, a Chief White House Correspondent, driving through the gates of the White House. As he does this, he says in the voiceover, "Our leaders need to be held accountable. I have unique access to the president and congress. I better use that access for a greater good." To align Todd and MSNBC with the values of professional journalism, the commercial draws attention to the representative role that Todd plays in the liberal democratic system and the representative relationship between him and the public. Though Fox News hosts are by all accounts political insiders like Todd, their representational strategy, being founded on a populist logic, tries to claim an exteriority to the political establishment and, thus, unlike Todd, Fox hosts tend to downplay as opposed to highlight their "unique access." Todd, C. (9/8/2011.). Chuck Todd MSNBC Promo. [Web Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRuqgWbbN-s>.

performances claim and occupy a working-class positionality in the symbolic landscape of the U.S. national media, a positionality more professional-minded journalists have not been willing and/or able to take on.

The main approach critics have taken when approaching the working-class personas of Fox News' top hosts is to identify what is inauthentic about them and their biography (Hart, 2003; Franken, 2003). While this has its political purposes, it says little about why the on-air personalities of Fox News's top hosts are so popular and how they have been effective at reinforcing the symbolic bond between political conservatism and the working-class. Historian Eric Lott (2007) stresses that class-based cultural forms, "do not so much belong to a given class or class fraction as they become sites in which class struggles are fought out" (p. 51). I apply Lott's point about class-cultural forms to performances of class identity on television and particularly to the classed personas of Fox News's top hosts. Throughout this dissertation, I strive to reveal the contradictions, inconsistencies and stereotypical qualities of Fox News' top hosts' performance as "average everyday schmo [s]" to use Glenn Beck's term. However, I devote an equal amount of energy seeking to understand what hasn't been explained about Fox News, which is the aspects of the host's populist persona that constitutes not a "real" working-class identity per se but a compelling performance of one.

Bourdieu's theoretical framework is useful for understanding these successful performances because it allows one to advance the analysis of conservative cultural populism beyond simply showing how class is expressed through "high" and "low" taste preferences. Bourdieu's dispositional analysis demonstrates how these preferences are the manifestations of more profound class-cultural differences based on different ways to evaluate and claim to know the world (i.e. different analytical tendencies, epistemological

standards and sources of knowledge). Piecemeal analyses of Fox News programming tend to analyze the taste-based appeals and lifestyle references hosts make during the broadcast as isolated acts and overlook how they signal a core logic and are constitutive parts of a more comprehensive and integrated representation of a working-class cultural identity. Only by watching the performances of Fox News's star hosts closely and for an extended period of time does one get sense of the subtle, dispositional character that the hosts seek to communicate and display. This has special implications for journalism scholarship because national news is a type of cultural form that—arguably more than any other form of popular media and entertainment—specifically hails its audience as an analyst of society, as a big thinker.

During the network era of broadcasting (1940s-1980s), the “epistemic culture” of experts and the professional class was treated as the normative culture of television news.⁷⁶ Almost uniformly, television anchors presented themselves as one type of thinker, one that exuded a technocratic brand of intelligence that I call a “professional intellect.” The professional intellect is characterized by a personally disinterested mode of analysis, a mastery of certified facts and a display of institutional competence. For most of the twentieth-century, professional journalism has treated this brand of intelligence as if it were universal as opposed to being a class, race and gender-specific way of viewing and evaluating social reality. In terms of taste, this professional intellectual disposition was (and still is) also characterized by an *aspirational* cultural appeal. However, building off of trends in public affairs media that were driven by the

⁷⁶ My usage of the term epistemic culture follows Karin Knorr-Cretina's definition in her book (1999) *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences make Knowledge*. Like Knorr-Cretina, I use the phrase epistemic culture to describe a culturally specific view of knowledge, which includes the privileging of particular schemas of evaluation, epistemic resources, and modes for legitimating truth claims over others.

daytime and talk radio revolutions of the 1990s, with the emergence of Fox News in the mid-1990s, anchors like Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity and, more recently, Glenn Beck developed and honed a working-class or lay analytical approach to the intellectual problems of political news and came to display a "popular intellect." Fox News's appeal to working-class taste and use of lay analytical modes gives a cultural expression to the network's self-representation as an anti-establishment news organization.

Fox News's 'Tabloid Soul': How the Tensions between Prestige and Popular News Markets Reinforce Fox's Populist Identity

There have been competing class-cultural markets in the journalistic field since the emergence of the penny press in the 1830s. Like Fox News today, these mass-circulation penny papers used the language of populism in their self-promotion and marketing and very much presented themselves as a "non-elite public" (Örnebring and Jönsson, 2004). For example, the founder of the first penny paper, Benjamin Day, maintained in 1833 that he created the *New York Sun* to give a voice to the "common man" (Örnebring and Jönsson, p. 288). As the descendants of the penny press, the largest, most popular newspapers of the late-nineteenth-century, Joseph Pulitzer's the *World* and William Randolph Hearst's the *Journal* also marketed their papers using the rhetoric of the people and also defined their papers' identity against the more established, prestige newspapers of their day (Convoy, 2002; pp. 51-54; Schudson, 1978, p. 92). And similar to the types of modern critiques one hears waged at Fox News, the penny press and "new journalism" of Hearst and Pulitzer's papers were criticized for things such as sensationalism, emotionalism, inaccuracy, over-simplification, for being all-style and no substance, and for, as a whole, 'dumbing down'

the national culture (Schudson, 1978).

Historians of U.S. and British news media have argued that the tensions between the style and market-address of the ‘prestige press’ and ‘popular press’ played a key role in the institutionalization of journalism overall (Schudson 1978, pp. 56-8; McGerr, 1986; Kaplan, 2002; Ornebring and Jönsson, 2004). Standing as the dominant public sphere, in each generation, the prestige press has been deemed by the journalistic community to be mainstream, “official,” and “serious,” while the popular press, representing an alternative public sphere, is perceived by the journalism community as, using Henrik Örnebring and Anna Jönsson’s term, a “journalistic other” or what John Langer calls ‘other news’ (1998). Historically these poles have tracked with positions of identification that extend beyond the field of journalism working to project and mediate national class distinctions, particularly, ones based on taste and education.

In the 1970s, Australian tabloid newspaper mogul Rupert Murdoch would acquire the *New York Post* and repurpose the paper as a tabloid. In doing so, Murdoch would become one of most significant major media owners to challenge the middlebrow cultural appeal that had been the predominant cultural address mainstream news outlets had used in the United States for most of the twentieth-century.⁷⁷ The *Post* stood and still

⁷⁷ In his book *The Decline of Popular Politics* (1986), Michael McGerr points to the origins of this middlebrow, professional address. He argues that the nineteenth-century partisan press’s popular style eventually gave way to what he describes as the “educational,” “extra-party” journalistic address that would rise to preeminence in the twentieth-century. By the late-nineteenth century, papers increasingly approached the reader as a culturally aspirational figure, one that imagines the reader as an introspective and independent (non-partisan) thinker. This new mode of address represented politics more as a matter of weighing one’s rational, self-interest as opposed to group loyalty and factional opposition. In his classic book *Discovering the News* (1978), Michael Schudson documents a similar shift. Schudson describes the class-based appeal of the nineteenth-century press as being related to what he refers to as the “story ideal,” that is, a form of politics and journalism that privileges a narrative style. Schudson contrasts this “story ideal” to the “information ideal” that was— by the late-nineteenth-century—increasingly used by more upscale news outlets like the *New York Times* and would become the dominant

stands as Murdoch's most concerted attempt to establish a British style tabloid paper in the U.S. and when it and other tabloid ventures did not take hold and become as successful as his papers in the U.K., Murdoch blamed these papers' lack of success on the aspirational taste culture of the U.S. news market. In the U.K., he told biographer William Shawcross, news viewers understood and embraced the tastes of their class but in the U.S., he argued, news consumers had a middle-class aspirational identity, what he refers to as the pervasive "self-improvement ethic" of Americans (Shawcross, 1992, p.

style of journalism in the twentieth-century. Also see (Kaplan, 2002). Firmly established by the 1920s and 1930s, the professional style of journalism would predominate twentieth-century news production and is still exhibited today by the more professionally esteemed news outlets such as the *New York Times*, *National Public Radio*, and CNN (though as I'll explain later, the professional address has been hybridized with popular cultural styles and has changed quite a bit as well). This professional style of journalism encouraged a political mode engagement based on inward reflection, self-education, and character cultivation, what historian Joan Rubin describes as a popularized adaptation of the genteel tradition, a middlebrow mode of address. In her book *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (1992), Joan Rubin argues that genteel ideology and cultural disposition of the mid to late-nineteenth-century did not die out with the rise of mass consumerism and mass entertainment but instead was readapted for mass culture and reconfigured as a aspirational cultural identity for working and middle-class Americans. Rubin argues that middlebrow culture was created in the period between the early twentieth-century and the 1950s. The growth of popular lecture circuits and popular educational radio programming helped develop and spread middlebrow culture. However, Rubin's history gives special importance to the role that major national newspapers played as platforms for middlebrow culture and as models for a new aspirational cultural identity. This becomes evident especially during the 1920s and 1930s as more and more major newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald* included book review sections. These new middlebrow forms of media adopted an Arnoldian view of culture (e.g. "the best known and thought") and stressed the importance of aesthetic discrimination and individual intellectual development and fused these values with a popular democratic ethos to broadly share 'good culture' with the popular masses (Rubin, 1992).

Moving into the 1950s and the 1960s, the middlebrow, aspirational address would take on an even greater centrality in American television appearing in advertising discourse, educational programming and appearing in public affairs and news programming. Michael Curtin's book on television documentary during the Cold War period, *Redeeming the Wasteland* (1995) demonstrates how FCC regulators, journalists and television executives articulated Cold War discourses with discourses that expressed the need to offer the mass citizenry culturally uplifting programming. In this way, self-improvement and self-education was framed as a patriotic act and the central way in which one expressed American citizenship. This argument is made more forcefully in Anna McCarthy's recent book on U.S. television during the 1950s titled *The Citizen Machine* (2010). Laurie Ouellette engages similar topics and themes in her history of Public Broadcasting in the United States titled *Viewers Like You?: How Public TV Failed the People* (2002).

160).⁷⁸ Undeterred by the mediocre performance of his U.S. tabloid newspapers, Murdoch maintained his conviction that the cultural monopoly of middlebrow news could be broken and a working-class cultural voice could be successful in the U.S. news market. Recognizing the central role of television in the American culture, Murdoch would launch a commercial television network, Fox Broadcasting Company in 1986 and Fox News in 1996 and it is in television that his working-class taste strategy would find its greatest success. Murdoch biographer Michal Wolff writes, “Fox News is a perfect reflection of...Murdoch’s very odd combination of mischief and sanctimony—that perfect tabloid formula. Fox is, in so many ways, the ultimate Murdoch product—all the lessons are combined and they all work. He produces, finally and successfully, his American tabloid” (2008, p. 282).

Like talk radio, day time talks shows, and tabloid newspapers, public affairs genres that Fox News shares stylistic affinities with, in the modern journalistic field I would argue that Fox News occupies a position akin to the tabloid press of the nineteenth-century.⁷⁹ This becomes especially clear when ones compare the marketing

⁷⁸ Also see (Wolff, 2010).

⁷⁹ The last several decades journalism scholars have debated whether or not the U.S. and the global media sphere has been going through a process of ‘tabloidization.’ ‘Tabloidization’ entails a process whereby the values of the tabloid news outlets—its entertainment-logic, “unserious” content, subjective-personal analysis—are colonizing the traditional, prestige news outlets displacing their professional journalistic values and news practices, i.e. “serious” content, objective, fact-centered analysis. In the introduction of an edited volume on tabloidization titled *Tabloid Tales: Global Debates Over Media Standards* (2000), journalism scholar Colin Sparks maintains that in practice there are no ideal examples of pure tabloid or pure professional news. Every news outlet is a mix of each style and genre. However, he argues, the distinctions lie in how news outlets proportion and prioritize professional and tabloid qualities. In this introduction Sparks lays out two primary sets of criteria for determining these distinctions: one) does the news agenda of the outlet focus on serious content such as politics and economics or “soft news” topics like celebrities, and sports, two) does the news outlet privilege a detached, objective style of analysis or a personal, subjective style. A criteria that is deemed less important but is mentioned by Sparks is an aesthetic criteria where the tabloid orientation of the news outlet is measured by how much presentational priority it gives to visual design and non-verbal, non-word-based forms of communication.

discourse of Fox News to that of the *New York Times*, a news outlet that exemplifies the modern 'prestige press.'⁸⁰ A *Times* television ad titled "the Weekender" that frequently aired on CNN and MSNBC in 2009, shows both the *Times*' conception of its place in the journalist field and how it constructs its imagined audience.

With nothing but the white graphic background of moving web and print pages of the *Times*, the main focus of the commercial is on the actors representing typical *Times* subscribers. Showing a group of mid-aged people, two white, one African-American, wearing professional attire standing in a half-circle talking, the voice over tells the viewer, "A subscription puts you at the center of a conversation." Then, a woman in a business casual skirt directly addresses the camera and asks, "Which sections are you fluent in?" Using the same direct address, a man wearing a black turtle neck sweater and box framed glasses responds with a slight smile, "I'm fluent in three sections actually: business, travel, and the book review," he says while counting each section on his hand.

Despite the way Fox News's is often viewed as an "unserious" news outlet by many in the journalism community, if one strictly evaluates Fox News by its programming content, one finds that its news agenda is more oriented toward the "serious," "hard news" topics of policy, federal governance, and history than toward 'soft news.' In this way, Fox News's top programs are not like traditional tabloid television programs and are not like Murdoch's tabloid papers in the U.S., U.K. and Australia. However, I find that when one measures Fox News by aesthetic-presentational (i.e. hyper-stylized visuals vs. austere) and analytical criteria (i.e. disinterested, impersonal analysis versus personally invested, subjective analysis), one sees the aspects of Fox News programming that tilts it toward the tabloid pole of the journalistic field (Sparks, 2000).

⁸⁰ I use terms like working-class and professional class taste, popular and professional intellect, as heuristic devices for deconstructing the class-cultural nature competing marketing strategies in the news industry. However, I realize that seldom do networks, genres, programs, outlets and even hosts surgically assume all the qualities of one class-cultural disposition and none of the others just like they seldom assume purely tabloid generic qualities and prestige qualities. As I will demonstrate in chapter five, Fox News programming exudes many of the qualities of traditional television news and professional journalism and, moreover, frequently features academics and intellectual culture in its programming. In turn, CNN and the *New York Times* have some tabloid and popular elements to their presentational and journalistic style and deploy variations of popular intellectual analysis in their respective news coverage. Thus, the class-cultural dichotomies I use should be treated more as spectrums and not as bright line distinctions. I do not argue that one single presentational element can determine the class-cultural address of a news outlet. To identify the types of class-based appeals a given program or outlet is using, I consider the overall composition of the program or news outlet's journalistic address.

The woman in the skirt reappears and says, “I just went to Spain and the travel section helped me plan my trip.” Another figure appears, a silver haired man wearing a formal business suit with a bright purple tie. He speaks to the viewer in a self-assured tone stating, “the best journalists in the world work for the *Times* and there is no debating that.” As evident in this last quote, one of the main themes of this ad is the *New York Times*’ unmatched prestige and professionalism as a news organization. However, equally important to discourses of professional distinction is the ad’s representation of a professional class social world and cosmopolitan *taste culture*. The ad represents this taste culture in various ways from the language, tone, and disposition of the characters, to a range of professional class styles of dress (e.g. business professional, urban-hipster, earthy-academic), interests and leisure activities (e.g. traveling in Europe, displaying “fluency” in different objects of knowledge and consumption).⁸¹

When looking at the field of cable news, specifically, at the Fox News’s main competitor CNN, one sees how cable news differs in many ways to prestigious print news outlets. For example, CNN places much more emphasis than the *Times* on things such as up-to-the-minute and around-the-hour information and the spectacle of war and disaster. Unlike the *Times* and similar to Fox News, visual aesthetics, hyper-stylized graphics and suspenseful audio tracks play a central role in CNN’s presentational style.⁸²

⁸¹ For ad, see (2/25/2009). *New York Times Weekender Promo*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gInOA9LmdiE>.

⁸² While commonplace in today’s television news environment, not too long ago these same presentational qualities were deemed tabloidistic and as degrading to the journalistic profession. Notably, the emergence of the newsmagazine genre and programs like *60 Minutes*, *20/20* and *Nightline* innovated—long before cable—many of the stylistic characteristics one associates with cable news today (e.g. confrontational interviews, moralistic rhetoric, personal analytic postures, hyper-stylized visuals and graphics, suspenseful music, etc...). These early news magazine programs faced similar criticism from the journalism community when they first emerged in the late-1960s that cable news faces today. Commenting on the premier of a new CBS newsmagazine program that emulated *60 Minutes* called *West 57th*, in 1985 *New York Times*

However, the marketing discourse of CNN, while not epitomizing the prestige press like the *Times*, shares discursive and aesthetic qualities with the *Times* and is commonly oriented toward the prestigious side of the journalistic field.

In a 2009 promo for *Anderson Cooper 360*, one of CNN's top-rated shows, a voice over says, "Anderson Cooper 360: Emmy-nominated for Investigative Journalism."⁸³ The viewer is then given a still shot of Cooper holding up and squinting into a state of the art mini-cam as if the photo caught him in the act of filming an independent documentary. Like the *Times*, discourses of professional distinction and appeals to professional class taste are central components of CNN's self-representation and characterize its embrace of what television critic Walter Goodman refers to as a "boutique programming" strategy (Hallin 2000, p. 218).

The marketing strategies of these two major news outlets in the journalistic field demonstrate how the values of professionalism and traditional journalism endure in the post-network, post-Fox News media landscape. However, rather than serving as the industry-wide standard of the journalistic field as was the case from the mid-twentieth-century to roughly the end of the century, the "high-modern" paradigm of journalism has become another strategy of product differentiation amongst others and has been, media scholar Dan Hallin writes, "squeezed into increasingly smaller niches within the media

television critic John Corry described it by saying, "think supermarket tabloid set to music." Corry, John. "TV Review; 'West 57th,' on CBS: Magazine Has Its Debut." *The New York Times* August 13, 1985. Print. Expressing a view that many professional journalists had about the growth of news magazine shows in the 1980s, former president of CBS News Bill Leonard described *West 57th* this way, "I thought it was well photographed and attractive to watch, but I don't think it was journalism by any stretch of the imagination." Blum, David. *Tick -- Tick -- Tick --: The Long Life and Turbulent Times of 60 Minutes*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004, 166 Print. However, as is often the case, the presentational and stylistic qualities of news magazine programs that were deemed to be unprofessional and uncouth twenty, thirty years ago, are today seen as the standard presentational practices of television news, including network news.

⁸³ For the ad, see Cooper, Anderson. (11/1/2011). *CNN: Anderson cooper 360 Promo*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdRF6QNNmT4>.

field” (2006). In his article, “Commercialism and Professionalism in the American News Media” (2000), Hallin’s analysis of the American news industry was prescient by suggesting—years before Fox News had fully matured—that the growth of partisan-tabloid marketing strategies and the transformation of professional journalistic styles of news into a niche-marketing strategy could lead to a greater class divide amongst the broader national news audience. “It is possible,” Hallin writes, “that we will see a division of the news audience into a wealthier segment that watches news produced on traditional journalistic lines, and another part that watches only news produced in a tabloid style” (p. 234).

In the Fox News’s self-marketing, discourses of journalistic professionalism are by no means rare and in fact play an important role as evidenced by the network’s motto “Fair and Balanced.” However, not only are professional discourses and modes of representation used in a way that differs from its competitors and is specific in its connection to the Fox News’s larger self-conception as a corrective measure against the U.S. media-sphere’s supposed liberal bias, Fox News’s marketing strategy gives greater presentational priority to popular discourses and styles and does not privilege discourses of professional integrity or distinction as much as its competitors do.

In a 2009 promo for *The O’Reilly Factor*, the viewer sees a black backdrop with smoke swirling in the air as to suggest an a fire or explosion recently occurred. The viewer hears a pounding drum beat. White capital letters appear that read: “THE ULTIMATE IN CONFRONTATION TV. A REAL VOICE FOR THE LITTLE GUY. LOVE HIM. HATE HIM. HE’S CLEARLY NUMBER ONE.” The viewer is then given a montage of video clips showing O’Reilly passionately debating, hands flying, body leaned forward and face abounding with expression. A voice over says, “Bill O’Reilly, number one in

cable news 100 months and counting.” The black backdrop returns and the viewer is given a series of O’Reilly sound bites: “You’re either a moron or a liar,” “The American people have a right to be angry,” “look,” his voice raises to a near yell, “stop the B.S!!!” While the ad makes nods to professional journalism values such as neutrality and objectivity when the voice over says, “no spin, no agenda, just the truth,” one sees in this promo how the citation of market indices and ratings (“100 months and counting,” “He’s clearly number one”) play a far greater role in establishing the program’s legitimacy.⁸⁴ In doing this, the quality that is most stressed in Fox News’s imagination of its audience is not its cultural or educational distinctiveness but rather the unmatched massiveness of the audience, a massiveness that stresses its likeness with or greater approximation to an imagined American majority.

One sees other key elements that contrast Fox News’s representational strategy from prestige news outlets. In claiming to give “a real voice for the little guy,” O’Reilly’s program utilizes populist discourse that, by its very formal structure, breaks professional conventions of journalism in that it openly abandons an attempt to speak from a socially detached, universal position. O’Reilly speaks and fights for a particular social faction that is imagined to be constantly under siege. In addition, the visual aesthetic, the music, the written text, the video clips, and the sound bites of the promo all demonstrate other important presentational qualities such as rhetorical bluntness, combativeness, physical and emotional expressiveness, all of which have historically distinguished popular/tabloid journalism from “official” journalism. Moving beyond the realm of journalism, these “impolite” stereotypical working-class characteristics have been

⁸⁴ For the ad, see O’Reilly, Bill. (4/2/2009). *O’Reilly Factor Promo #1*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hb50B7mu1ic>.

constructed and solidified for centuries in American popular culture by a variety of other forms of media and participatory forms of public leisure, particularly nineteenth-century forms such as vaudeville, cabarets, and touring circuses (Gamson 1998, 30-35).

One of the most important presentational features that contributes to Fox News's popular aesthetic and the host's performance of a working-class cultural disposition that this promo highlights is the role displays of emotion play in Fox News programming. In her book *The Money Shot: Trash, Class, and the Making of TV Talk Shows* (2002), Laura Grindstaff demonstrates how in daytime television class-cultural differences, she writes, "organize around norms of emotional and bodily restraint" (p. 30). Grindstaff maintains that daytime television producers often use the term "ordinary" to describe the working-class cultural identity of the guests ("real stories from ordinary people"). But she clarifies that the term is not used to mean typical or representative of the population. Rather, returning to what one finds in *The O'Reilly Factor* promo above, in daytime television "ordinary" tends to signify a particular and often spectacular performance of a working-class cultural identity that is specifically marked by the guest's unreserved disposition and tendency to communicate great emotionality and bodily expressiveness. On Fox News, moments for displaying emotionality often occur in context of partisan confrontation. However, with the inclusion of Glenn Beck's more introspective, emotionally vulnerable style, emotionality is performed in Fox News programming during moments of personal disclosure as well and this very much parallels daytime television. Most commonly, emotional expressiveness accompanies the Fox News's host's moral arguments about a given topic, when they express what is right and who is being victimized.

In the genre of daytime television, creating emotion-inducing moments is the key

to creating “good television” or what Grindstaff calls “the money shot.” Grindstaff shows how these seemingly spontaneous displays of emotion (“money shots”) are in fact partly manufactured by television producers through how and which guests they book and which topics they select. Similar to daytime television, Fox News’s top programs stage or increase the likelihood that an emotionally charged confrontation will occur by forecasting what the dynamic between the hosts and the guests will be like.⁸⁵ The liberal guests that are confronted on Fox News’s programs by the host tend to have professional, reserved cultural dispositions and in this way, by contradistinction, the Fox News host’s less reserved, “ordinary” disposition is highlighted in these exchanges.

Because talk radio has a similar political edge, Fox News’s journalistic style is often compared to its generic qualities. While the meteoric rise of conservative talk radio in the late-1980s and 1990s significantly contributed to the formation of Fox News by giving Murdoch and other investors evidence that populist conservative media can be successful in the United States, in terms of presentational style, Fox News’s top programs arguably have a greater resemblance and owe a greater cultural debt to the explosion of daytime television in the 1990s when Fox News was launched.⁸⁶ After all,

⁸⁵ As one liberal political analyst that appears on Fox News’s top shows told me in an interview, “Good TV for Fox News means that there is verbal combat and when there is verbal combat, as I understand it, the ratings go up. They want actual debate, they want people who aren’t going to be afraid to disagree, if you’re passive, they won’t have you on more than once or twice...they want people who can do combat so most academics I would say are too probably civil to do this work.” In the interview, the liberal Fox analyst goes on to differentiate his experience on other channels like Aljazeera English, Russian Television and MSNBC where the discussion is far less combative. Going on Fox News, he says, “is a very different ball game for liberals...[because] its all about the combat” (personal communication, December 19, 2011).

⁸⁶ Watching the great success of the *Phil Donahue Show* in the 1970s and 1980s, followed by *The Oprah Winfrey Show*’s even greater success in the mid-1980s, network television executives in the 1990s would launch an unprecedented amount of daytime talk shows so much so that by the mid-1990s (when Fox News was launched) there was roughly two dozen daytime talk shows on air (Grindstaff 2002, p. 50). In addition to sharing the emotionality of daytime talk, Fox News’s top programs have another key similarity that positions them closer to Oprah Winfrey than Rush Limbaugh, which is, like Oprah, Beck, Hannity, and O’Reilly consistently interpret the current

one the most influential figures in crafting Fox News programming style, CEO Roger Ailes, started his career in daytime television, not radio. Before becoming a media consultant for the Richard Nixon and the Republican Party, in the 1960s Ailes worked as production assistant on a daytime talk variety show called *The Mike Douglas Show*. Mentored by Chet Collier, a veteran of TV syndication, Ailes' first understanding of "good television" was shaped by the generic values of daytime television, which, include an emphasis of visceral forms of communication, finding people with "character," embodied performance, personal testimony and the epistemological value of lived experience. In his book *You Are the Message* (1995), Roger Ailes maintains that one trick he regularly used to judge the potential talent of anchors and political speakers was to watch footage of them with the sound off and to focus closely on their physical appearance, mannerisms and body language. Ailes writes, "If there was nothing happening on the screen in the way the host looked or moved that made me interested enough to stand up and turn the sound up, then I knew that the host was not a great television performer" (p. 43).

Another quality of Fox News programming that is more deeply connected to the rise of daytime television in the 1990s is the practice of confronting experts by countering their formalized knowledge with lived experience. In a 2009 interview with the *New York Times*, Ailes described his and Fox News's mutual success by stating, "I built this channel from my life experience. My first qualification is I didn't go to Columbia Journalism School. There are no parties in this town [New York City] that I want to go to" (Carr and Arrango, 2010). In distancing himself from elite spheres of leisure and taste

events and topics of discussion on their programs through their personal biography and lived experience. While Limbaugh does this on occasion, this practice is far more pronounced by Fox News's top hosts.

elite educational credentials, and in trumpeting, as mentioned earlier in this interview and other interviews, his blue-collar upbringing, one sees how Ailes turns to many of the same self-presentational themes that the star hosts he coaches utilize on air. One of the most notable things about this quote is how Ailes' conceptualizes "life experience" as a "qualification."

In their book, *Talk On Television* (1994), Sonia Livingstone and Peter Lunt discuss how the traditional epistemological hierarchy is reversed on daytime talk shows. They write, "Audience Discussion programmes adopt an anti-elitist position which implicitly draws on alternative epistemological traditions, offering a revaluation of the life-world, repudiating criticisms of the ordinary persons as incompetent or ignorant, questioning the deference traditionally due to experts through their separation from the life-world and their incorporation into the system" (p. 102). In professional circles, arguments that lack data and methodological grounding are not legitimate. However, as Livingstone and Lunt demonstrate, in the field of daytime talk, popular epistemological frameworks take precedence over formalized ones and thus, for example, because the expert's lived experience is assumed to be different from the majority's lived experience, it is the expert's arguments that appear ungrounded or divorced from reality.

In their concept of 'reflexive modernization,' sociologists Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens maintain that this distrust of expertise is part of a larger societal trend that extends beyond the discursive domains of television discourse and public affairs media. In the post-industrial era and from the 1970s onward credentials and expertise are increasingly losing nearly automatic credibility these sources of authority once enjoyed. In order to attain public trust, institutions increasingly have to supplement or replace expertise with alternative epistemological frameworks and analytical dispositions (Beck

and Giddens, 1994).

Because the ideology of professionalism and rationalism have had such a foundational place in the history of twentieth-century journalism, in the journalist field one has yet to see, contrary to alarmist claims, such a reversal or even a subjugation of professional expertise. However, as media scholar Dan Hallin has discussed, over the last thirty years there is no doubt that the modernist paradigm of expertise and bourgeois civility no longer has, to the chagrin of many liberal news figures from Jon Stewart to Dan Rather, the degree of discursive centrality and epistemological supremacy it once had in the network era (2006).

With the fall of a unitary epistemological system and the increased distrust of official sources, journalists have increasingly turned to unconventional, lay sources of knowledge (Baym 2010) and assumed more interpretative and judgmental approaches to official statements (Schudson 2003, p. 112). Under Ailes' stewardship, Fox News was not only quick to register these broader changes but was one of the first news networks to create and master new interpretative strategies around the breakdown of the lay-expert divide (Peters, 2010). However, I argue that the network's choice to give far greater presentational priority and legitimacy to a popular intellect is not simply tied to a profit motive or is not simply the product of a postmodern zeitgeist that took hold of the news industry, rather I see this representational choice as being directly tied to the network's larger populist branding strategy, a strategy that interlocks with and is reflective of the ongoing hegemonic project of the conservative movement.

Conversely, it also is the product of centrist and liberal media and the Democratic Left's choice to consistently represent professional class culture and lifestyles as the national cultural ideal. "I don't know when progressive politicians in general lost touch

with the tabloid soul,” sports writer Charles Pierce wonders. To answer this question, Pierce cites the response given to him by Representative Marcy Kaptur of Ohio who he describes as a “stalwart foe of NAFTA and proudly untriangulated old Democrat.” Kaptur, who, interestingly is running against Joe-the-plumber in the fall elections of 2012, suspects, Pierce writes, “that it might have been educated out of the party” (Pierce, 2002, para. 38).

Chapter One Conclusion

Like most studies of political communication, my analysis of Fox News seeks to demonstrate how and why the network’s political messaging is persuasive. However, in this chapter I have presented an interpretative framework for understanding the efficacy of Fox News programming that differs from typical analyses of Fox News. Studies that have examined Fox News’s rhetorical strategies tend to attribute their influence to crafty deliberating skills and techniques Fox News hosts use to deflect liberal criticism and/or deligitimate and distort liberal arguments in a debate-like competition (Conway et al, 2007, Jamieson and Cappella, 2008; Brock and Rabin-Havt, 2012). Drawing on a discourse method of analysis and Laclauian populism theory, my analytical model for examining Fox News programming seeks to highlight not how Fox News pundits “win” and “deny” arguments, but rather how the mode of address and discourses they use reinforce a particular layout of identity positions one can take when evaluating their place in the political culture of the United States. The interpretative framework I have developed in this chapter does not occlude the reasons Fox News’s hosts give to support their interpretations of news stories. However, it does imply that the ideological force of the arguments Fox News hosts make is significantly derived from how these

arguments are preceded by and mediated through the network's special conceptualization of the American political terrain. What is most important about Fox News programming is not how Fox News hosts and pundits debate well, tell the truth or lie but rather how they are effective at presenting political conservatism as the political philosophy of the ideal social majority, a social bloc that is assumed to be the standard bearers of traditional morality. My analytical model seeks to reveal the signifying processes that enable Fox News programming to naturalize the linkages between conservatism and the white working-class and, as the other side of the coin, that make the idea of a white working-class liberal sound awkward and politically unthinkable.

As in the past, in the contemporary media sphere there is a dialectic relationship between the marketing strategies of the prestige and tabloid-oriented news outlets. Fox News's willingness to legitimate itself as a news organization on an audience-size-over-awards basis and to use a majoritarian mode of address and tabloid aesthetic offers CNN and the *Times* a well-suited counter-audience against which they can construct their own market addresses and consumer appeals. In contrast, to commercial popularity and majority thought, CNN and the *Times* appeal to those who place greater value on elite knowledge, cutting-edge technology, and cultural vanguardism. Fox News equally depends on CNN and the *Times*' willingness to market themselves as the more tasteful and professionally distinguished news outlets that a smaller, but a more select and educated type of consumer prefers. As much as Fox News's marketing of themselves or even as much as their negative framing of their media rivals, it is crucial to acknowledge how the *Times* and CNN's very own marketing strategies work to stabilize their association with professional class culture and thus reinforce the Fox News's use of these news outlets as referents of an elite class. *Morning Joe*, for example, a morning

news-based talk show on MSNBC (another one of Fox News's key rivals), goes as far as to proclaim in their promotions that they're the "thinking viewer's choice" as if to suggest Fox News's morning shows appeal to people who prefer news that addresses them as non-thinkers. In this way, one sees the cooperative role that Fox News's moderate and liberal news media rivals play in the construction of the Fox News's populist positionality. The best evidence of the hegemonic quality of the Fox News's political mapping of the class-cultural groups in the United States is how Fox's media rivals accept this mapping and perpetuate and disseminate it well beyond the confines of the conservative media establishment.

Chapter Two: ‘think and talk like them’: Representing Class as a Taste Culture and Brand of Intelligence

I’m not an expert, but I am thinker
Glenn Beck

In an episode of *The O’Reilly Factor*, host Bill O’Reilly introduces the night’s topic with poll numbers that show that white workers without college degrees favor Republican over Democratic candidates. O’Reilly spends the rest of the segment positing why this. O’Reilly’s analysis reveals one of the main ways in which Fox News programming imagines the conservative viewer as a social underdog and populist political subject. O’Reilly says that one could explain the poll numbers by the economic downturn, however, he then adds, “minority workers [who support Obama] are apprehensive as well, so there must be more to this.” O’Reilly goes on to state:

“Talking Points Memo” believes it is a *class factor*. President Obama and the Democrats are simply not in sync with white working-class *values*....Now the liberal media would have you believe that white working class Americans are opposing Mr. Obama because of his skin color. That is a blatant lie. While there are bigots in every group, it is the *cultural disposition* of the president. That is his problem now...the liberal media ignores the *cultural aspect* of Mr. Obama.....Now, the liberal media is going to overlook the *cultural aspect* of Obama’s declining poll numbers because it, itself, looks down on working class Americans. (10/6/2010)

How does one make sense of the claim that “class” is the main “factor” driving the white working-class’s alienation from the Democrats and from Obama or O’Reilly’s seemingly

counter-intuitive argument that by *class* he does not refer to economics but to a “cultural aspect”? What does he mean when he uses the terms working-class “wisdom,” “values,” and “cultural disposition”? Looking at some of the positions O’Reilly associates with working-class culture, such as illegal immigration and the ground zero mosque, in the broadcast, one might conclude that by class-culture he means white culture. As evident in this clip, Fox News programming often constructs the identity of the white working class in contradistinction to racial minorities. In chapter four, I analyze the central role that whiteness plays in Fox News’s construction of ‘the people,’ the workers and ‘the producers.’⁸⁷

However, by assuming that Fox News’s invocation of working-class identity is simply a stand in for whiteness or a symptom of ‘false-consciousness,’ one abdicates an attempt to understand how conservative media figures make appeals to the working-class *in terms of class* as opposed to as a substitution for something else, another

⁸⁷ There are fairly obvious qualities about Fox News one can point to in order to draw the connection between the network’s construction of working-class culture and whiteness. In a *New York Times* article titled, “When Race is the Issue, Misleading Coverage Sets Off an Uproar,” (2010) Brian Skelter suggests that, in order to offer its audience with a scapegoat for the nation’s economic ills and to mobilize white racial resentment, Fox News repeatedly featured racially charged stories during the Recession (e.g. the firing of Sherley Sherrod, ACORN controversy, New Black Panther Party polling intimidation). In addition, during this period Fox News pundits made numerous accusations that Democrats, Obama, and African-American political organizations like the NAACP were guilty of reverse-racism against conservatives and white Americans the most famous being when Fox host Glenn Beck said on-air that president Obama has a “deep seated hatred for white people” (Bauder 2009).

These content-oriented observations become even more substantial when one considers how homogeneously white Fox News’s audience demographics are. In 2010, the main demographic feature, next to age, that distinguished Fox News’s audience from all of its television news competitors was its exceptionally low number of African-American viewers. Using Nielson’s demographic statistics, Skelter shows that a meager 1.38% of FNC’s viewers are African-American. In contrast, African-Americans make up 20.7% of CNN’s audience and 19.3% of MSNBC’s. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/07/26/fox-news-audience-just-13_n_659800.html. While Fox News’s audience demographics and the “hot button” racial stories the network consistently incorporates in its editorial agenda play important roles, in chapter four, I strive to show the more subtle and complex ways in which Fox News represents and deploys racial identities and makes appeals to the white majority.

identity such as race, gender, religion or fake class distinctions as authors like Thomas Frank (2004) and Geoffrey Nunberg (2005) suggest. In this section, I will explain how Fox News's top-three rated programs represent a working-class cultural disposition in order to establish the network's counter-elite brand. A crucial way Fox News hosts perform this disposition is by assuming a hostile posture toward expertise and professional class taste (albeit selectively as I'll show in chapter five). Critics commonly interpret this posture as an indicator of Fox News's anti-intellectual slant. However, one should not equate the network's opposition to credentials and high culture as being anti-intellectual wholesale. In adopting this conclusion, one tends to overlook how Fox News programming makes a case for a particular brand of intellectualism, which serves to hail a *classed* news viewer. In addition to making aesthetic and taste-based appeals, Fox News programs convey their cultural association with the working-class by constructing and celebrating a lay intellectuality, or what I refer to as a "popular intellect." Through the deployment of these representational components, Fox News asserts a theory of class as a cultural identity.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how Fox News's most prominent hosts build the populist brand of the network by performing a working-class cultural disposition in two ways: by displaying an allegiance to working-class taste and a working-class cultural past, and by exhibiting a popular intellect. In the first section of this chapter, I will analyze the techniques Fox News's top programs use in order to represent working-class taste. In the second section, I will show how Fox News coordinates taste-based appeals with its representation of working-class intelligence. Lastly, I will demonstrate how Fox News hosts embody a popular intellectual disposition. Before beginning with

Fox News's construction of working-class taste, I will briefly outline the three component parts of the popular intellect.

In an episode of his show, Glenn Beck greets the audience and tells the viewer, "Hello, America. I know that progressives have tried to tell you otherwise, but you don't need to be a rocket scientist to lead America. You don't need a degree from Harvard or Yale. It's not a prerequisite for president. But there are a couple of essential traits that you need. One: honesty. And two: common sense. You need to be able to look at a problem and see what the solution is, what make sense and what doesn't (6/7/2010). While laying out the prerequisites for an ideal political leader, Beck reveals the three core components of Fox News's representation of working-class intellectualism: the *invested disposition*, *lay knowledge*, and *anti-credentialism*.

1. By stressing the importance of "honesty," Beck suggests the first component of the popular intellect. This component speaks to an analytical approach to issues characterized by an *invested* evaluative disposition. This invested mode of analysis is oriented toward exposing or disclosing the social interest behind each statement or piece of evidence as opposed to verifying its credibility by its own merits or internal qualities. This disposition also entails the expression of personal concern. In Fox News programming, the host communicates concern by stressing his social ties to the topic of discussion and by displaying emotion. Fox News's approach stands in contrast to the *disinvested* gaze and 'objective distance' of the expert or professional journalist.

2. The term "common sense" is prevalent in the debates or monologues of all of Fox News's top-three-rated shows and is regularly counterpoised to expertise (Peters, 2010). But more than entailing superficial praises of majority thought or the use of maxims and colloquialisms, Fox News's construction of common sense involves a

complex and elaborate representation of lay bases of knowledge, such as personal and interpersonal experience, national cultural traditions, and collective memory.

3. Beck's comment, "You don't need a degree from Harvard or Yale," suggests the third component of the popular intellect. Though they are celebrated and revered by most in the journalism community, Fox News anchors regularly assume critical or hostile postures toward objects of high educational capital such as degrees, titled expertise, and elite institutions of higher education. In turn, Fox News hosts frequently assert the value of autodidactic learning and utilitarian knowledge. The adequacy of the non-college educated mind is regularly affirmed and, in some cases, deemed more pure in not being corrupted by educational institutions and their supposed hidden agendas.

In the following pages, I will demonstrate the relationship between popular taste and the popular intellect in the construction of the host's working-class cultural disposition. Next, I demonstrate the three core components of the popular intellect outlined above in Fox News programming. I conclude by arguing that Fox News's three top-rated programs claim to speak for and as 'the people' by constructing and representing a working-class taste culture, particularly as a sub-component, a working-class epistemic culture.

Displaying Working-class Tastes and Backgrounds

Fox News programs are interspersed with "soft news" items about celebrity gossip, sports, and other types of pop culture. But Fox News is not the only news channel to engage in this practice. To various degrees, all modern television news outlets have incorporated infotainment into their programming repertoires. Save PBS, most contemporary outlets shade "hard news" content by presenting it in highly visual

and aestheticized ways (Caldwell, 1995) and by regularly juxtaposing the “serious” issues of economics and politics with references to the non-serious fields of popular entertainment and leisure (Baym, 2010; Zoonen, 2005; Baum, 2003; Fox, 2001). Compared to the network era, contemporary news programs across the political spectrum share many aesthetic and topical similarities. Yet, by overemphasizing these general similarities, one overlooks important differences between Fox News's and its competitors' strategies for incorporating entertainment and “soft” content in news programming. The entertainment-based content featured in Fox News's broadcasts draw connections to particular sectors of pop culture and particular lifestyle practices, especially those typically identified with lowbrow taste. In some cases, pop cultural objects and knowledge are built into the format of Fox News programs. For example, on *The O'Reilly Factor*, a discussion on Obama's tax policy is followed by a recurring segment called the ‘Great American Culture Quiz’ where fellow pundits are tested on questions like “What was the second biggest hit off of Elvis Presley's *Jail House Rock* album?” Sometimes pop cultural references are used not as distractions, but as means of explaining serious issues. In one episode of *Glenn Beck*, Beck prefaces his explanation of the banking system and its effects on the viewer with a scene from the classic film *It's a Wonderful Life*. After an elaborate explanation featuring statistics and economic graphs, Beck reconnects his analysis to the film's narrative by stating, “that's the way [the banking system] normally works. OK, we learned that on “It's a Wonderful Life” (2/19/2009).



Image 1.1: *Hannity* segment transition graphic

The *Hannity* program more than the other top shows, integrates a lowbrow aesthetic in its guest-selection, graphics and music. Host Sean Hannity, in particular, makes sports and musical references to align the program with working-class taste. For example, as a staple of the show, Hannity ends each broadcast by posturing like a quarterback and throwing a *Nerf* football to an unseen person off set. Moreover, Hannity frequently mentions sports-related events in his rhetoric and relies on sports analogies when discussing policy, and, like every “Joe-six-pack,” banter with guests who support or play for rival teams.

Music and visual graphics are also used on *Hannity* for cultural appeal. In contrast to the international and high-tech iconography of CNN’s graphics, *Hannity*’s graphics resemble interstate road signs and other symbols of Americana. In addition to its nationalist connotations, *Hannity*’s interstate sign logo plays on icons of Americana, specifically car culture, and the mythologies tied to Route 66 and the Interstate Highway System.⁸⁸ A recurring program-break graphic on *Hannity* is a mosaic of state license

⁸⁸ Fox News’s visual branding and “graphic inclination” (Caldwell, 1995) is known for (and parodied by *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show*) its saturation of images of American flags, white stars, and red and blue color schemes. American flags not only pervade other program-

plates, such as one may find in a bar or at an *Applebee's* restaurant (see image 1.1 above). Other program graphics on *Hannity* consist of cartoon depictions of 1950s roadside dinners and drive-ins and resemble refrigerator knick-knack magnets. The choice of an interstate road sign as its main symbol, which encapsulates banality and public life, highlights the *Hannity* program's strategy of connecting its visual aesthetic with the culturally unexceptional. In contrast to the suspenseful orchestral music heard during the breaks of CNN news programs *Hannity* features electric guitar licks played with distortion and timbre, resembling the end of a Southern Rock song. Contemporary country music hits are also frequently played in segment transitions.⁸⁹

break graphics seen on Fox News's top shows but also drape in-studio set designs. This patriotic visual branding choice expresses the hyper-nationalistic (and often jingoistic) nature of the Fox News's politics, especially in the mid-2000s. While I agree that nationalism, even a type of "authoritarian populism" using Stuart Hall's term, is a central discursive element to both Fox News's rhetoric and visual semiotics, reducing the network's iconography to nationalism misses the crucial ways in which maps of United States and American flags symbolize taste preferences and class differences. When signifying "tackiness" as opposed to military might, the public display of traditional symbols of patriotism (e.g. flag) can convey an oppositional stance to the taste of educated professionals who find such outward displays of patriotism hokey, and consequently expresses a social affiliation with the working-class.

⁸⁹ The program's audio and musical aesthetic reinforces Sean Hannity's repeated on-camera pronouncements for his love of country music and his off-camera role in organizing yearly country-music-themed "Freedom" charity concerts.



Image 1.2: Hannity's "Great American Panel"

Along with comedians and pro-athletes, country music stars represent the most recurring type of celebrities that appear on discussion panels and in interviews on all three of Fox News top-rated shows (see image 1.2). However, because celebrities make up an important faction in Fox News's representation of the liberal elite and because the concept of celebrity works against the logic of cultural populism, Fox News is selective about which genres and celebrities it allies itself with. As represented by its preference for country music, the cultural genres privileged in Fox News programming are those that are also invested in the "culturally ordinary" and that have their own narratives about industry-based discrimination by elites.⁹⁰ The entertainers who appear on Fox News

⁹⁰ One way in which Fox News creates the cultural linkages between itself and non-news cultural industries that also use cultural populist marketing strategies like country music is by threading together its narrative of marginalization in the journalistic field with similar anti-elitist narratives that other genres and celebrities use to explain their marginal position in the entertainment industry. Fox News hosts regularly prime celebrity guests to offer narratives of cultural marginalization. In an interview with Jeff Foxworthy, a comedian who became famous by marketing himself as a "redneck," Beck tells Foxworthy that media critics depict Beck's audience as "bunch of idiots" and then asks, "Do they attack your audience as well? Because, you know, you're just a hick. You've got no talent too." Foxworthy responds, "Oh yes....We caught the same thing on the "Blue Collar" tour. I mean for the few negative reviews we got, they were making fun of the people in the audience" (6/16/2009). In a reciprocal fashion, cultural populist figures from non-news genres will draw cultural alliances with political conservatism in their own cultural texts or media appearances and even reference Fox News specifically. By criticizing institutions of cultural prestige like the Academy Awards for their supposed biases against

deny their celebrity status in the public sphere. Like every celebrity, blue-collar comedians, country musicians, and Fox News hosts are highly self-conscious about their public image. However, they differ from other celebrities in that rather than striving to epitomize hipness or a modern lifestyle, they are self-conscious about avoiding coming across as exceptional or socially distinct from their fans. An episode of *Glenn Beck* provides an example of an unsuccessful attempt by the host to perform his cultural ordinariness. In his “small business forum,” Beck says to Brett Parker, the CFO of New York City bowling alley, “you think your business would be doing well right now because you’re not going to uber elite, you’re going to the average everyday schmo, are you not?” Parker responds with a smirk on his face, “well, we cater to a little bit more upscale than your normal bowling alley audience. But we’ve really been hurt.” Following these comments, Beck defends his assumption that bowling is a lowbrow leisure activity for “everyday schmos” by declaring, “I bowl!” Contradicting Beck’s performance as a regular guy and pointing to Beck’s exceptional wealth Parker responds, “and yes, you’re pretty upscale” (8/17/2009).

Because the acknowledgement of their tremendous affluence compromises their populist performance and threatens to create a social break between them and their audience, Fox News’s star anchors deploy different representational tactics to prevent or repair such breaks by reiterating their humble origins. It is not a coincidence that all three of Fox News’s top-rated hosts repeatedly mention their Horatio-Alger-style autobiographies during the show. In numerous episodes, Hannity refers to his grandparents’ experience as Irish immigrants and his job as a construction worker

conservative artists, Fox News not only cements the connections between the network and certain cultural forms, but also extends the narrative of cultural elitism beyond the journalistic field broadening its social significance.

before television. O'Reilly repeatedly references Levittown, the working-class neighborhood where he grew up in. Beck reminds viewers about his working-class background by saying on numerous occasions, "I grew up poor." However, his autobiographical forays emphasize that his life before becoming a celebrity was filled with familial dysfunction, alcoholism, career dead ends, and other failures.⁹¹ Through scattered but repeated statements about their humble origins, Fox News hosts create images of their working-class backgrounds, which serve to nullify their celebrity status and simultaneously present them as social equivalents to the audience.

Because American culture has long celebrated the ideal of meritocracy and narratives of upward mobility, the tendency of public figures to adapt the humble-beginnings narrative trope for biographies crosses party lines. One has to look no further than Barack Obama's presidential campaign to find a liberal example of the same phenomenon. In the 2008 presidential election, Obama's life story about coming from the working-class and being raised by a single mother as a person of mixed race took center stage and proved to be one of the most compelling elements in the campaign strategy. Yet while liberal media figures reference their working-class backgrounds and promote economic majoritarian policies, they—unlike their conservative counterparts—seldom make claims that they still belong to the working class. Liberal figures tend to acknowledge the social gap between themselves and the people whom they represent or address. In contrast, conservative media figures like Hannity, Beck, and O'Reilly deny their roles as representatives altogether. Because they present themselves as

⁹¹ For example, Beck says in one episode, "I have been a failure most of my life. It is just this recent period where things seem to be going well. It wasn't too long ago that I was curled up in a fetal position on a floor in an apartment I could barely afford and couldn't afford the presents for my kids on Christmas" (11/25/2009). As mentioned in chapter one, this tendency to frame the topic of discussion in relation to the host's life story and the tendency to offer personal disclosures and private information resembles the generic qualities of daytime talk.

belonging to the people, which is evident in their use of plural pronouns such as “the rest of us,” “we have to pay taxes for everybody,” “this is our country,” their on-camera performance suggests that they embody the people.

In the contemporary political landscape, few liberal media figures exert themselves in performing a working-class cultural disposition.⁹² This reluctance to take up a cultural populist strategy stems from liberal leaders' tendency to promote the aspirational identity of an educated professional. There are many reasons for the historical linkage between higher education and the Democratic left. The student movement's of the 1960s helped forge this link and the fact that higher education has historically been one of the few open channels for upward mobility for women and people of color, key constituencies in the Democratic coalition. Because of the central place that higher education plays in the Democratic Party's postwar vision of the American Dream, liberal media figures tend to be more concerned with appearing as educated rather than as homespun.

As a result, liberal politicians tend to be more mindful of the cultural standards of authenticity held by college-educated audiences, standards that value a sociological reflexiveness about social hierarchies and institutions. In numerous episodes of *The Factor* that feature Jon Stewart as a guest, the left-leaning political media figure that matches O'Reilly in stature expresses this critical reflexivity by repeatedly challenging

⁹² *The Ed Show* on MSNBC is an exception to this. Host Ed Shultz, like Bill O'Reilly, has a confrontational style and performs a working-class cultural disposition, which, again, distinguishes him from most liberal media figures that strive to exhibit to a professional class image. In contrast to Fox News programs, however, Shultz's attacks corporate America and defends public welfare and public employees. In addition to featuring prominent African-American leaders and intellectuals, *The Ed Show* differs by regularly features labor leaders and union organizers as political pundits and news analysts. These labor leaders, following the history of the labor movement, strive to exhibit a working-class cultural disposition. By advancing pro-Labor and anti-racist discourses, *The Ed Show* demonstrates how cultural populism is not inherently attached to conservatism, white nationalism, and supply-side policy proscriptions.

the authenticity of O'Reilly's populist persona. In one exchange with Jon Stewart, O'Reilly accuses president Obama of "separating himself from regular folks" and then assuming the perspective of the people, states, "the people are going 'come on, you're the leader of the country. You have to comment.'" Noticing O'Reilly's rhetorical assumption of the people's perspective, Stewart asks, "what people?" O'Reilly responds, "The folks, regular people. The people who watch me. Not you." Pointing to great social distance between O'Reilly and working-class Americans, Stewart counters, "When was the last time you visited Levittown, Bill?" (9/22/2010).

In his book, *From Cronkite to Colbert* (2010), Geoffrey Baym maintains that this sort of critical reflection on the theatrics of politicians and political media figures is a key component of news-based comedy shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. Baym argues that these 'infotainment' programs accomplish what many traditional news outlets fail to do – expose, dissect, and critique the deceptive techniques of modern political communication through satire and comedy. While Baym explains how this type of "critical inquiry" benefits a "deliberative democracy," he gives less consideration how this satirical mode of critique appeals to audiences.

Reflecting the ironic and skeptical sensibility that is at the heart of *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show's* evaluative approach, in his book *Distinction* Pierre Bourdieu argues that the professional class cultural gaze finds "nothing more naive or vulgar" than texts that take themselves too seriously and try to convince the audience to invest their own identity in the text. Rather than allowing them to lose themselves in the artifice of the text, like a blockbuster film invites the viewer to do, these news-based comedy programs offer the viewer the pleasure of imagining themselves as capable of seeing through the "easy seductions" and the "art of illusion" involved in what Baym

refers to as the ‘dramaturgy of politics’ (e.g. the epic narratives, “every guy” marketing ploys, photo-ops, rhetorical framing).

As parodies of different genres of news-based media, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, engage in political theater only to denounce its conventions, artistic effects, and performance of sincerity. Texts that produce pleasure in the exposure and depreciation of ‘the theatrical fiction’ and conspicuously play with formal qualities such as genre conventions reflect elements of a professional class cultural sensibility (Bourdieu 1984, p. 33). I am not arguing that these formal elements and the class sensibility they reflect sum up *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* nor am I suggesting that irony itself or these programs appeal exclusively to educated professionals. However, when considering that these programs consistently gain critical acclaim and earn accolades from prestigious cultural institutions, it is clear that *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* speak to and target a professional class viewer.⁹³ While Baym attributes the “anti-realist skepticism” expressed on *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* to an epochal postmodern sensibility that supposedly the entire national culture shares, I would argue that the prioritization of the “skeptical” and anti-realist address of these programs partly operates as way to make appeals to professional class tastes.

In contrast to the ironic mode of address that characterizes news-based comedy shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, Fox News programs assume that the viewer approaches the media text with a ‘good-natured credulity’ and a ‘deliberate naivety.’⁹⁴ Rather than expecting to coerce audiences into thinking that the millionaire

⁹³ As Baym notes, trade publications like *Advertising Age* have called the *The Daily Show* “the Oprah Book Club of the political press,” for “its ability to reach an educated audience that reads political non-fiction.”

⁹⁴ This is not to say that Fox News programs exclude certain types of skeptical modes of address. As indicated by *The Factor*’s catch phrase, “No Spin Zone,” Fox News programming often claims

celebrity hosts are just like them, Fox News's address implies that the viewer has a "desire to enter into the game" and identify with its performances and representations (Bourdieu 1984, p. 33).

While programs like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* counter the theatricality of politics through satire, Fox News's top programs counter political theater by attempting to give a more convincing, realistic performance. When Bill O'Reilly says, "I've got to tell you something, though. I eat at Red Lobster. I like Red Lobster. And they give you lots of shrimp for free. I eat there" and Hannity says, "I played 'The Best of Alabama' in my car. My kids know the songs by heart," they perform a *sincere* connection with working-class taste.⁹⁵ In contrast, when news-based comedy shows and other cable news programs feature objects of lowbrow culture, they approach these objects ironically and, thus, like a backhanded compliment, perform a distance from their audience.⁹⁶

While CNN and MSNBC hosts commonly make references to popular taste in the course of their otherwise serious programs, they do so in a playful or quaint manner.

Moreover, these references often appear as isolated events and do not, like on Fox

to expose the illusions and deception of modern politics. However, rather than doing it by critically analyzing the political field's theatrics through satire or formal analysis, Fox News hosts rely on open confrontation, aggressive questioning and investigative reporting (which devolves on occasion into gotcha journalism). If the news-based comedy program critiques political theater by engaging in political theater, Fox News programs counters the theater of politics with the aesthetic of logic realism or with more realistic political theater than their political and media rivals. This realism is expressed by the hosts' disclosure of their personal convictions, the performance of a down-to-earth, working-class persona and of personal concern through the display of emotion.

⁹⁵ *The O'Reilly Factor* (11/23/2009), *Hannity & Colmes* (11/17/2008)

⁹⁶ For example, one sees this in *The Daily Show's* "Pantry of Shame" segment where, to the laughter of the audience, Jon Stewart cites different types of highly processed foods like "Baconnaise" and the "pancake wrapped sausage on a stick" that he and his staff supposedly enjoy. This ironic approach to working-class taste is also assumed by the anchors of Fox News's cable news rivals. For example, in one episode of CNN's *AC 360*, host, Anderson Cooper announces, in tongue and cheek manner as expressed by the grin on his face as he says it, that his favorite reality show star is "Snookie."

News, interlock with complementary representational tactics for performing the cultural ordinary and an overarching narrative of anti-elitism. In short, conservative leaders and media personalities—even ones that do not have working-class origins like George W. Bush—place far more energy into performing a working-class cultural disposition than their liberal or left counterparts. While liberal figures reference pop culture and align themselves with certain popular entertainers and the cultural forms, they tend to privilege cultural forms that aspire toward hipness and/or critical acclaim. Liberal figures often engage in cultural populist discourse. However, the performance of the culturally ordinary by conservative media figures, especially those on Fox News, is far more systematic, multidimensional, and assertive. Most importantly, conservative political figures strive to perform sincere alliances with working-class culture that invite the viewer to assume a good-faith approach when reading their performance.

From Popular Taste to Popular Intelligence

After the development of cable news and satellite in 1980s, the line between the field logics of journalism and entertainment were blurred to a much greater degree (Baym, 2010; Zoonen, 2005). This blurring of boundaries between politics and entertainment resulted in cross-genre hybridizations in television news. Currently, television news outlets—almost across the board—include various non-news generic elements in their programs from late-night talk to variety show to comedy. Consequently, nightly news programs incorporate far more “soft news” content.

Fox News has been the vanguard of many of these changes. The channel was the first to adapt talk radio’s combativeness and host-driven format to television news and incorporate daytime television’s drama and emotionality and a tabloid magazine’s

“low-brow” aesthetic. One sees in an episode of *Glenn Beck* how entertainment-related issues are interlaced between the serious topics of federal governance and foreign policy. Giving the viewer a preview of what will be discussed in the hour-long broadcast, Beck goes over what he calls “Tonight’s Hot List,” which includes in this given episode Obama’s economic summit, Hillary Clinton’s trip to China, Federal aid for the reconstruction of Gaza, and Sean Penn winning best actor at the Oscar.

Before breaking into a discussion on Chinese-U.S. trade relations, Beck hints at the diatribe he gave against actor Sean Penn earlier in the program and tells guest James Glassman, ex-undersecretary to president George W. Bush, “I couldn’t take the Academy Awards but maybe that’s just me.” By bringing up the Academy Award and speaking to a guest of “official” importance in such informal terms, Beck exemplifies the personalization of public discourse and the entertainmentization of public affairs media that marks some of the distinguishing characteristics that separate modern news from traditional television news (Baym, 2010; MacDonald, 2000; Corner, 1991). However, the exchange between Beck and his guest also demonstrates how particular news outlets align or distance themselves with particular sectors of pop culture. Given Fox News’s cultural populist address, the fact of Beck’s inclusion of a pop culture event is less important than the antagonistic position he assumes toward the Academy Awards.

In turn, near the end of the episode, Beck allies himself and the program with another, less hip sector of pop culture by having country singer Trace Adkins perform one of his latest songs. This incorporation of a live musical performance into the broadcast is something one typically finds on a late-night talk show rather than on a news program. Before the performance, Beck sits down with Adkins to discuss both politics and his latest single. Beck tells Adkins:

I wanted to have you on, because one thing I liked about you is, the first time we met, you said, "Once in a while, I just get so fed up. I just go out to my tractor and plow the field." And I thought of Thomas Jefferson when he said that he would much rather be judged by a farmer and a man who has his hands in the soil than anybody in a university or any learned man.

Adkins: [cocks his head and smiles] He was smart.

Beck: He was smart. (2/23/2009)

In Beck's first few words in the interview "I wanted to have you on," one gets a sense of how Adkins's presence, that of a looming 6'4 man, with a full beard and mustache, long hair, and a large black cowboy hat, serves a symbolic purpose. As a country singer, Adkins not only symbolizes ordinary taste but also, in the setting of a news-based analysis program, a working-class base of knowledge and intelligence. According to Beck's framing, Adkins's "smarts" are based on work experience, counterpoised to formal education, and are legitimated by national civic traditions.

The expression of a given taste culture does not only involve conveying aesthetic preferences, but also communicates one's tie to different types of intelligence and analytical abilities (Bourdieu, 1984). Simply put, definitions of good taste are entangled with definitions of smarts, which occurs partly because different taste cultures entail different epistemic cultures. Because news has been traditionally conceived of as a cultural form for the mind, in the network era of television news executives and producers did not prioritize aesthetic concerns and lifestyle interests (Caldwell, 1995). However, since the rise of the multichannel era, news has become much more stylized and entertainment-oriented. For this reason, the symbolic linkages between representations of types of tastes and types of intelligence have become more important and more apparent in the news media.

Because political news engages the serious issues of public policy, federal governance, and economics, the cultural form is more explicitly involved in the social construction of intelligence. Fox News programs share, overall, a hard news editorial agenda and thus, like all political news genres, hail their audiences as subjects who “think” about major societal problems, political debates, and ideological differences, in other words, the stuff of intellectual culture. What distinguishes Fox News’s mode of address from prestige news outlets is that it does not particularly address its viewer as a culturally aspirational subject seeking to approximate the lifestyle, elite knowledge and analytical disposition of educated professionals.⁹⁷ On the contrary, Fox News asserts the value of a lay capacity to deliberate about the political world and affirms the adequacy of common wisdom and personal experience for analyzing public matters, as opposed to the formal knowledge the viewer aspires to have or needs to be taught. In short, rather than a professional intellect, Fox News’s top programs perform a popular intellect while analyzing the news.

So what does this popular intellectual mode of analysis look like in the course of a broadcast? In the final section, I will demonstrate Fox News’s construction of the popular intellect by breaking it down into its three component parts: invested disposition, lay knowledge, and anti-credentialism.

The Invested Disposition and the Performance of Concern

Contrary to critiques that suggest Fox News is not “news” in the first place (Altermen, 2003; Auletta, 2003; Brock, 2004; Kitty and Greenwald, 2005), scholars

⁹⁷ However, as I’ll discuss in chapter four, Fox News’s free market rhetoric hails an *economically* aspirational subject and approaches the working-class viewer as a *potential* small business owner, or member of the business class.

such as Chris Peters demonstrate the many ways in which Fox News programs adhere to and replicate the news practices of traditional television journalism (2011, pp. 839-840). However, Peters also points out the significant ways in which Fox News's model of journalism does depart from traditional television. According to Peters, the most fundamental quality that distinguishes Fox News talk shows from the newscasts of old is that they reject, Peters asserts, "objectivity's most visible mandate—distance" (p. 835). While traditional news anchors base their legitimacy on their ability to demonstrate a disinterested posture, O'Reilly performs an "experience of involvement," according to Peters. Consequently, in his analysis Peters stresses that *The O'Reilly Factor* presents alternative journalistic "rules of truth," which measure credibility by whether or not a reporter can "perform beliefs" with conviction as opposed to the traditional criteria of whether or not he or she can stand as an "uninvolved" relay for facts and official statements. In the culture of Fox News, displaying one's emotional ties and personal attachments to the news item becomes the means of legitimation as opposed to professional liability.

Peters sees this as a worrisome development because it means, he writes, "the beliefs of the host are both the starting point for debate and evidential proof for assertions" and this self-referential mode of legitimation "lowers the threshold demanded under journalism's traditional rules of truth"(2011, p. 842). While I share these concerns, I believe that when one centers their analysis of Fox News primarily around them one overlooks, as Peters does, how Fox News's transgression of the epistemological and dispositional standards of traditional television news reflect and serve representational strategies and logics that are found beyond the field of journalism.

When one looks at the involved approach and preoccupation with the performance of transparency of Fox News anchors through the lens of populism and analyzes the performance of emotionality with reference to the generic conventions of daytime television (the format where Fox CEO Roger Ailes began his television career), one discovers that the channel's traits may be novel to television journalism but are old to political culture and television entertainment. What one also discovers by considering other discursive logics and television genres is that in Fox News programming “performing belief,” which Peters focuses on, is always contingent on performing identity, something Peters does not adequately address. In the following section, I will demonstrate the dispositional quality of the popular intellect and explain how it relates to Fox News’s construction of class as a cultural identity as well as to the network’s broader populist representational strategy.

As media scholar Dan Hallin has pointed out, the professionalization of journalism co-developed with the rise of science as the dominant method for making truth-claims and thus the objective disposition of the scientist became the preferred disposition of the professional journalist (2000). Therefore, if the production of elite knowledge is methodologically sound and is deemed sufficiently disinterested, the journalist must analyze it (e.g. a statistic, a statement, a historical comparison) as a non-intentioned, self-contained unit of truth and present it to the public as being universally credible.⁹⁸ Exhibiting a disinterested approach to the evidence is crucial for the

⁹⁸ Following the logic of science, traditional journalists discourage injecting one’s identity or personal attachments into the coverage of a given issue. The primary way the journalist avoids self-involvement is by privileging sources of information whose basis of legitimacy rests on the same claim of disinterestedness, i.e. scientists, experts, public officials. This creates a process whereby experts, what Stuart Hall calls, the ‘primary definers,’ produce elite knowledge that *pre-*frames the news agenda and then the journalists, ‘the secondary definers,’ translate this official

professional journalist and for professionals in general. By displaying their personal distance from the object of analysis, professionals establish the autonomy and thus the integrity of their evidence, which supports the legitimacy of their statements. By presenting evidence as both objectively produced by the expert and objectively imparted by the journalist, the traditional news media and contemporary prestige news outlets attempt to offer the public a common set of epistemological standards for making and evaluating competing claims, standards all actors in public debate can mutually utilize and respect. This is the essence of what Hallin calls the “high modernism” of American journalism, the “strong faith in unity and rationality, a confidence that professionals and intellectuals could rise above social divisions and contradictions to produce knowledge of universal validity” (2006, para. 1).

In contrast to this model, Fox News’s top anchors discard the objective disposition and assume openly interested, advocacy postures in their coverage of the news. Looking at its history, one finds that this advocacy posture is an essential part of the network’s institutional DNA. Declaring that its founding purpose was to represent the supposedly underrepresented citizens that were alienated by the ‘establishment media’ and its so called liberal bias, from its launch in 1996, Fox News’s business model and marketing strategy have been organized around a notion of what O’Reilly calls, “looking out for the folks.” But by “folks,” O’Reilly does not mean the “general public” or the universal-citizen subject of high-modern news. Rather, his use of the “the folks” is more akin to the populist signifier of ‘the people’ and thus refers to a *particular* social faction that is represented as both the *ideal* national majority on one hand and as a social bloc

knowledge into a ‘public idiom’ that makes it accessible for a lay audience (Hall et al, 1981, pp. 342-45).

that is disenfranchised and perpetually under siege on the other. Equally if not more important than its partisan manifestation, Fox News's advocacy stance is, as explained in the introduction, fundamentally expressed through a populist rhetorical framework that relies on the themes, archetypes, and narrative forms that have persisted in American political culture for centuries. In addition, Fox News's populist address and advocacy stance take on new, more stridently populist dimensions during the network's promotion of the Tea Party street protest movement in 2009.

The crucial consequence of Fox News's involved, populist journalist style is that it changes how truth claims are evaluated in the political public sphere. Under Fox News's highly politicized conflict model of public debate, all evidence is assumed tendentious (Cappella and Jamieson 2008, p. 246). The autonomous status of institutionally produced facts is met with suspicion and, thus, facts, as units of knowledge, lack the ability to bear truth self-referentially. In light of Fox News's conception of the public sphere as a highly interested and minimally objective informational space, the professional's performance of being uninvolved comes across as insincere and, in some cases, purposely deceptive. Rather than producing the truth-effects a professional analytical disposition once yielded, Fox News hosts go the opposite route and embrace what I call, drawing from Bourdieu, an "invested" evaluative disposition (1984, p. 34-50).

As I argued earlier, the logic of the popular aesthetic outlined Bourdieu's research in many ways parallels the logic of Fox News's popular intellect. More specifically, the invested analysis that the Fox News anchor uses for evaluating news topics mirrors working-class schemas for evaluating objects of everyday consumption. Commenting on the ways in which workers approach artistic photographs, Bourdieu argues, "the image is always judged by reference to the function it fulfills for the person

who looks at it or which he thinks it could fulfill for other classes of beholders” (p. 41).

Unlike the detached, bourgeois gaze that evaluates art as an autonomous product that “has no referent other than itself” (p. 43), the popular evaluative stance measures the text’s value by its assumed social uses and affiliations or, as Bourdieu puts it, by the assumed “interest [behind] the information it conveys” (p. 43).

Assuming an invested analytical orientation, the Fox News anchor measures the truthfulness of nearly all information by its connection to social and political interests, particularly, by whether or not the object of analysis potentially harms or helps the interests of ‘the popular bloc.’ In a professional public sphere, the credibility of a given statement is evaluated by how well it measures up to institutionally certified evidence regardless of whether the statement serves a particular social group is irrelevant to its truth-value. In contrast, the emphasis of Fox News’s top hosts is on demonstrating how his interpretations and conclusions are *invested* in the interests of ‘the folks.’ The Fox News host’s ability to base claims in ‘official’ evidence is no doubt important and is an ever present practice but it is of secondary importance compared to the need to display personal convictions and social loyalties. If the game of legitimation in the high-modern period of journalism was based on performing objective distance, the game of legitimation in Fox News programming is based on performing *concern*.

In an episode of *The O’Reilly Factor*, O’Reilly engages in a heated debate with Neil Cavuto, the host of a Fox News Business program, about whether or not the banks and oil companies harmed ‘everyday Americans’ in the pursuit of greater profits. In the midst of the 2008 financial collapse, the presidential campaign, a climate ripe with broad based anti-corporate public sentiment, O’Reilly adopts anti-corporate rhetoric and asserts pro-regulation policy proscriptions. In the lead-up segment to this debate,

O'Reilly says of the two presidential candidates, "both guys need to be very specific when it comes to what they want to do to protect Americans from irresponsible corporations."⁹⁹ He then cites an example of corporate irresponsibility saying, "By the way, as I pointed out yesterday, the price of oil has declined about 33 percent in two months. But the price of gas at the pump has declined seven percent. The oil companies strike again and nobody is watching them."

Furthermore, O'Reilly sets up the debate stating, "Now for the top story tonight, another view of this. Fox News business anchor Neil Cavuto, always a defender of corporate America (saying with a smirk on his face)." O'Reilly's tongue-in-cheek introduction socially ties Cavuto to the oil industry, so that before the debate even begins, the viewer is oriented to see Cavuto's subsequent statements through the lens of his implied interests and priorities.¹⁰⁰ Sensing this effect, Cavuto shakes his head at O'Reilly and replies in a pleading tone:

you got to stop this.....18 months ago, when a barrel was at \$50, gas was at \$2.22 a gallon, right, so we got up three times that rate on oil, right? Why didn't gas prices go up three times that way to be almost \$7? Why didn't - you can pick and choose your date range, Bill. You criticize politicians for playing fast and loose with the numbers. So why do you pick a period that suits your argument.

Cavuto uses an evidence-dependent line of critique to challenge O'Reilly's claims. First, he cites a flurry of alternative sets of numbers that, in trying to give the viewer a broader

⁹⁹ In later chapters, one find that as the crisis unfolds and the Tea Party emerges, O'Reilly and other Fox News's commentators draw back this anti-corporate rhetoric and return to the conventional antistatist, pro-deregulation political economic arguments that they have historically advocated.

¹⁰⁰ While O'Reilly smiles when he says that Cavuto is "a defender of corporate America," suggesting a sense of humor, the comment identifies Cavuto's potential social allegiances that are framed in opposition to the viewer's interest in the previous segment. O'Reilly usually uses this lighthearted sociopolitical tagging technique when debating guests who are perceived to be liberal or leftist. For example, in a debate I will analyze in the following section, O'Reilly introduces a liberal professor by saying, "Let's bring in our favorite socialist, Dr. Mark Lamont "Che" Hill."

temporal scope of price ranges, claims to present self-evident proof that oil companies are not raising prices for selfish reasons. Second, Cavuto undercuts O'Reilly's statistics by suggesting that the host did not evaluate the evidence on the matter objectively and instead manipulated the evidence to "suit his argument."

Because it relies heavily on numbers articulated at the frenetic pace of a cable news talk show debate, Cavuto's argument comes across as dizzying in the broadcast. O'Reilly, sensing this convolution, counters with his characteristic "straight talk" by responding, "Let me ask you a very simple question. Do you believe the oil companies are NOT maximizing, and that's a word you got to use, their profits at every turn?...Do you think they're being fair with the American people?" Rather than debating Cavuto's numbers or bringing in additional statistics, O'Reilly shifts the entire mode of analysis with these questions. Implying different schemas of evaluation, these questions reframe the truth of the oil companies' culpability to being a matter of what one intuitively *believes* about their interests and what those interests say about the companies' intentions rather than what is revealed by the evidence. Now, Cavuto is forced to challenge not O'Reilly's evidence but the commonsense belief that oil companies care more about profit than about everyday consumers.

In his response to these questions, Cavuto initially attempts to follow O'Reilly's line of argument saying, "is it—wait a minute. Is it their responsibility to get fair (stumbling with his words) or their responsibility to pass along the cost and the percentage of operation..." Uncomfortable with O'Reilly's in-the-folk's-interest or not criteria, Cavuto then abandons this line of argumentation and brings the discussion back to O'Reilly's statistics stating, "by your definition though, you just said a statistic...By your definition then, they should be gouging us with \$7 gasoline now. And it's a lot less

than that.” More cross talk ensues between the two of them and the viewer senses that Cavuto is becoming increasingly more frustrated. Abandoning the discussion about “data,” Cavuto charges, “you push this populist nonsense that doesn’t make sense. And you get people to believe it.” O’Reilly, not addressing Cavuto’s statements about “populist nonsense,” repeats the previous question, “you don’t believe they are [the oil companies].” Repeating the same question once again O’Reilly suggest that Cavuto has yet to disclose his true, personal beliefs about the issue. Cavuto, “I don’t believe they are.” O’Reilly finishes, “no, and I do!” (8/16/2008).

As one sees in O’Reilly’s last statement “and I do [believe it],” the truth ultimately rest in the host’s opinions about the issue as Chris Peters emphasizes in his research on Fox. What one also sees in this exchange, however, is how the content of his opinion gains credibility less by evidence and more by what social and political interests his opinions purport to advance or challenge. In *The O’Reilly Factor*, the media itself is not only one of the most predominant topics of discussion, but is also identified as the number one villain (Conway et al, p. 207-210) and thus is attributed with immense causal power in determining political outcomes (Jamieson and Cappella 2008, p. 51). Thus, arguments and beliefs voiced in the political public sphere are, in Fox News programming, never evaluated simply by their own merits. Instead, objective evaluative schemes are always layered and sometimes supplanted by an evaluation based on whose perceived interests the stated beliefs serve and whose perceived lives the stated beliefs affect.

Instead of performing objective distance and facticity, Fox News’s populist hosts strive to disclose the social interests at play and authenticate their concern for the issues and their personal commitment to their argumentative positions. As evident in the

network's narrative of combating liberal bias and in the exchange between O'Reilly and Cavuto, this invested disposition can be expressed by the host drawing broad populist social alignments and asymmetries and pronouncing his advocacy for the popular bloc. However, due to its societal scale, this expression of investment lacks a personal quality and therefore the ability of the host to express concern in this manner is limited.

One way in which hosts heighten the expression of their concern for 'the folks' is by regularly referencing their personal histories and presenting their stories as representative of the popular bloc's shared social history. As discussed earlier, all three of Fox News's top-rated hosts consistently mention their backgrounds and family members during their program. Aligning themselves with an imagined majority audience, they represent their childhood as a typical working-class and, implicitly, white, heteronormative up-bringing. By consistently making references to their background over the years of broadcasting as well as on their radio shows, books, and speaking tours, anchors create an elaborate narrative of their social origins, one that enables mutual identification and, ultimately, mutual trust between the host and viewer (Norton, 2010).¹⁰¹ The detailed personal histories that Fox News hosts build across broadcasts and invoke during broadcasts form not only a base of experiential knowledge, but also lend credibility to their stated interests and social loyalties and provide the basis for their deep personal concern for millions of viewers whom they've never met.

¹⁰¹ In "A Structural Hermeneutics of *The O'Reilly Factor*," Matthew Norton discusses the important role of O'Reilly's life story in the construction of his on-camera identity, which he aptly calls "the O'Reilly persona." He asserts that the construction of this persona helps establish "para-social relations" and a "mediated intimacy" between the host and viewer, which, in turn, guides the viewer's evaluation of the arguments and claims being advanced. Norton writes, "the imagined person, that persona, provides a relational point of access to the show—if we know a party to a dispute, it matters to us much more" (2010, p. 325).

At the end one episode of *The Factor*, in a routine segment where the host responds to viewer mail, O'Reilly breaks into a promotion of his latest book after reading an email that compliments it. O'Reilly maintains that viewers can learn everything they need to know about his motivations for participating in *The Factor* by reading his book, *A Bold, Fresh Piece of Humanity*, which is essentially about O'Reilly's childhood. From this O'Reilly segues into a much grander point, "There's no question that we are ground zero here, to the traditional forces of this country. And we win most of our battles, but the war is hard, and there's a reason that I'm fighting it. That reason comes from my father, my neighborhood, my school teaching experience, my reporting, and my religion" (8/29/2008). Not only does O'Reilly describe his role as a news anchor in highly advocative and combative terms, he discloses his motivations for advocacy as derived from his background and values.

The professional seeks to counter the distorting effects of self-interested analysis with disinterested analysis. However, for the Fox News analyst the choice is no so much between interested versus disinterested analysis. Rather, the real choice is between different types of interested analysis. Arguing from an openly self-interested position is obviously not an option for a Fox New anchor because it would present him or her as both unprofessional and, worse, power seeking and morally baseless. Therefore, Fox News hosts embrace an overtly 'ethical disposition' (Bourdieu 1984, pp. 44-50) that consistently seeks to express their moral interest in each matter and to emphasize how their analysis is guided by communal values and norms that transcend their self-interest. Rather than striving to display a morally agnostic analytical approach, as a professional researcher would, Fox News hosts exert immense effort in performing moral

righteousness. As a result, the defense of the host's reputation and integrity often takes up significant portions of any given broadcast.

In an episode of *Glenn Beck*, Beck and guest, Stephen Moore, a senior economic writer of the *Wall Street Journal*, discuss the 787 billion dollar stimulus bill that was to be passed the following day. As often happens, this policy discussion turns into a broader dialogue about the national debt. For the majority of their conversation, both men turn to pie charts, statistics, and historical and international comparisons to assert their mutual argument that the Keynesian policy measures being enacted by congress and the president will be *technically* ineffective and will actually worsen the economic crisis. In place of these measures, both advocate for supply-side economic solutions. Then, near the end of their conversation Beck addresses Moore with an entirely different mode of analysis and proceeds to make a case against government spending and greater market regulation by suggesting they pose a *moral* threat. Their conversation continues as follows:

Beck: you've got children

Moore: right

Beck: once you have children, you really don't care about yourself as much anymore.

Moore: that's true

Beck: I can't get past that we are looking at a country that is going to be so dramatically different in 10, 15 years from now, maybe even two years from now, so dramatically different we wouldn't even recognize it, not in a good way. Our children, as Jefferson said, it is immoral to pass debt onto the next generation

Moore: yes

Beck: we're passing an anchor for their neck, are we not?

In the following lines, Moore affirms Beck's moral framing of the latest policy events and

adds some of his own morally tinged comments before leaving the program. Concluding his interview with Moore, the spilt video screen disappears and the viewer is given mid shot of Beck. Before addressing the camera directly, Beck averts his eyes downward to one side and begins to scratch the back of his neck as to suggest both deep contemplation and to perform a type of nervous gesture one would give before expressing something personal that is difficult to say. Beck discloses:

You know what America? Here's the thing. I want to try to help you get a handle on this because I'm struggling with it. I'm just a dad. I'm a schmo. I was a deejay in 2000. I didn't...I'm a self-educated guy. So take everything I say with a grain of salt. I'm not one guy who's not looking [out] for you. I am one guy who's looking out for my kids. That's all I care about. I'm doing this job not because I have to...[Beck pauses his speech and slightly looks to side], not because I want to...[he pauses again and now the camera begins to slowly zoom inward toward his face], but because....[squinting his eyes, he looks down again and his gaze searches back and forth expressing an attempt to grasp a deep feeling], it's my duty, [he says with an exhale] just like it's [pointing to camera] your duty whatever you're doing right now, I mean this sincerely.
(12/16/2009)¹⁰²

At the beginning of this clip, Beck's description of his role as a news commentator follows the conventional goal of journalism, which is to help viewers better understand or "get a handle on" major national events and issues. However, unlike the traditional journalist whose news practices are committed to the values of professionalism and whose voice is legitimated by credentialed authorities, Beck legitimates his voice by pronouncing he is "just a dad" whose main reason for "doing this job" (i.e. analyzing the

¹⁰² It is notable that on his very first episode on Fox News on January 19, 2009, in his first chance to introduce himself to the Fox News audience, Glenn Beck used this same rhetorical frame to establish the voice of his program and his motivation for being a political commentator. In this first episode, Beck says to his audience, "I will tell you, I'm not going to do it by promising to fight for you, because I'm not, to be honest with you. I'm not a crusader. I'm just a dad. I'm struggling to make sure that my kids get a chance to live in the same America that I did, an America that holds principles above parties and common sense above poll numbers."

news) is to serve a basic and collectively shared conviction to look out for the well-being and future of his children. In framing his intentions for acting as a news commentator as a means of protecting and advancing the interests of his family, Beck establishes the moral basis of his analytical disposition and provides a rationale for expressing deep personal concern for nearly every news item he approaches. In his performance of frank disclosure about where he is coming from, Beck insists that his primary motive is not to look out for his audience (making a subtle dig at O'Reilly's key phrase). Yet, in saying "just like it's your duty" Beck implies that he and the audience share a common set of moral standards and personal priorities and thus he presents himself as indirectly looking out or advocating for his audience by conducting "his job" according to the standards and priorities he assumes his audience shares. In this way, Beck implicitly claims to echo their will and perspective.

Representing Common Sense: Lay Epistemologies and Socially Situated Knowledge

In an episode of *The Factor*, O'Reilly plays a clip from CNN's *Larry King Live* that shows a heated exchange between liberal media-mogul Arianna Huffington, and actor and conservative activist Chuck Norris, who has filled in as host of *Hannity* various times and thus has familiarity with Fox News's preferred anchor style. O'Reilly leads in the clip by saying, "if you missed the shootout between Chuck Norris and Arianna Huffington, well (donning a mischievous grin), here it is." CNN's distinctive crimson red backdrop appears and the viewer sees a split screen with three pundits in the video windows. Resembling a lumberjack with his full red beard and plaid flannel shirt, Norris is the first person the viewer hears. "We can debate the question," says Norris, "about whether we

should be in Iraq or not in Iraq? But we are there, and we've got to take care of the situation there. I've been there twice, Arianna. I've done two tours over there. I know what's going on over there. You haven't been there (ending the last sentence in a disdainful tone).”

By drawing a stark line between his and Huffington’s knowledge of the issue and by using a personal, confrontational address, Norris creates an awkward moment of silence among the discussants. After the pause, Huffington breaks in and responds, “This is really the most absurd response. Because the fact that you have been to Iraq, I’m sorry to say, makes no difference, compared to the fact...” Norris interrupts her, “Yes it does! I’ve talked to the troops over there.” Huffington tries to finish her point, “The president and John McCain and Sarah Palin...” Norris interrupts again, “I talked to the troops and they say to stay there until we finish the job” (8/15/2008).

In this exchange one sees that Norris cites his personal experience as well as his interpersonal experience with “the troops” as the evidential basis for his claim that he knows “what’s going on” and Huffington does not. Rather than legitimating his voice and ideas by referencing official statements made by military commanders or political leaders, or, as Huffington did earlier in the discussion, cite governmental statistics about the war, Norris attempts to undercut Huffington’s points using non-professional “rules of truth.” Visiting a war zone as a celebrity-civilian and meeting the soldiers there only twice suggests a very shallow depth of experience and a superficial social familiarity. What is important, however, is the fact that in a nationally televised debate on foreign policy, Norris thought to use his personal experience and his relationship with the troops as the basis of his expertise. This argumentative maneuver helps one gain a better understanding of Fox News’s representation of lay knowledge. *The Factor’s* choice to

feature a replay of the debate is significant as well because it not only shows its approval of Chuck Norris and disapproval of Huffington, but also signals the program's affirmation of the epistemological orientation Norris adopted in the debate.

As Norris' case reveals, experiential knowledge is a core epistemic resource in Fox News's construction of common sense and is repeatedly used by the channel's hosts to justify their truth claims. For example, in an episode of *Hannity* focusing on the BP oil spill, Hannity follows his argument about the incompetence of the government and the president's response to the catastrophe by saying, "It's frustrating, because, I'm looking at, look, I love fishermen. I have friends of mine that fish for a living. They clam out in the bays of long island. I have people that I know they work hard. Their livelihoods may be interrupted for generations" (6/14/2010).

Along with displaying such components of the popular intellect as the disclosure of feelings ("I love fishermen") and the assumption of an advocacy stance, Hannity legitimates his claims about the issue by citing social ties that have a lived connection to the topic of discussion. By doing so and in using a phrase trades fishermen would use ("clam out"), Hannity "socially situates" his knowledge as opposed to situating it in a body of literature or a set of institutional references (Baym, 2010). While the traditional news anchor strives to make statements that appear to "come from nowhere" in order to express the professional tenet of neutrality, Fox News hosts abandon this convention and instead work to highlight how their claims come from somewhere, i.e. from a particular community, social location, and set of living conditions. Conventionally, the legitimacy of formal knowledge is threatened by the exposure of the social relations behind its production. However, Fox News's hosts foreground the social connections

they have with the object of analysis and use knowledge based on long held interpersonal relationships, especially familial ones.

In an episode of *Glenn Beck*, Beck tells the viewer, “you question everything that I say to you. You hold tight to your family, your principles, your values. You know what is true. The things that your parents and your grandparents taught you” (11/11/2009). In the first lines Beck casts suspicion on not necessarily himself, but on the institutional authority his role as a political news commentator implies. Beck then suggests that when deliberating about “serious” political issues of the day, the epistemic resource that should be privileged over all others is the knowledge passed on by family members.¹⁰³ Fox News programming frequently highlights the role that interpersonal interactions play in the formation of the hosts’ views and knowledge about the world.¹⁰⁴ Hosts regularly recount, during the broadcast, conversations they had “the other day” with family members or personal acquaintances. In an episode of *Hannity*, where a discussion

¹⁰³ In addition to being valued for their association with “traditional values,” Fox News hosts frequently cite and revere the knowledge of their parents and grandparents. Reinforcing their valorization a lay epistemological traditions, the hosts claim expert understanding of their relatives’ life experiences and suggest that by having lived longer and *experienced* more, parents and grandparents represent a greater depth and scope of lived knowledge. Moreover, as I will elaborate on in later chapters, because of their older age, the experiences of parents and particularly grandparents are commonly invoked when Fox News hosts use history to make arguments about contemporary policy. For example, in an episode of *The Factor*, what begins as a discussion about the war on terror and the use of “enhanced interrogation” transitions into such issues as World War II, the use of the atom bomb, and invasion of the Japanese mainland, which never occurred. O’Reilly says to a guest pundit with confidence, “it [the potential death toll of the invasion] was knowable because the invasion was underway. In fact, my father was on a ship on the way to Japan. So it wasn’t unknowable” (5/4/2009).

¹⁰⁴ When comparing news-based analysis programs on Fox to those found on other networks, one finds that in Fox News programs interviews segments and talk (i.e. interpersonal exchanges) comprise a greater portion of the hour long broadcast than the programs formats of its competitors who give more time to packaged reported pieces. In one Pew study (2009) the authors note, “Interview segments accounted for at least four-fifths of the airtime on *Hannity & Colmes* and *The O’Reilly Factor*....O’Reilly has traditionally made his encounters with guests a linchpin of his program” (see cable section and the content analysis of cable section). In short, Fox News programs, by their very format, emphasize interpersonal interaction to a greater extent than their competitors.

panel weighs in on the professional golfer Tiger Woods's sex-scandal, Hannity, as is common, cites his wife's opinion telling the panelists, "my wife says that his [Tiger Woods] wife is not staying with him" (12/9/2009).

Even when recounting interactions with powerful figures or official sources, Fox News hosts often present the discussions as casual conversations. To maintain the appearance of distance, traditional journalists seek to mask the personal relationships they often have behind the scenes with public officials when they cite them as official sources. In contrast, Beck regularly attempts to de-officialize the elite sources he cites introducing them as "good guys" or as "friends."

For example, in an episode of *Glenn Beck* that discusses the Wall Street bailouts of October 2008, Beck tells the viewer, "look, I have friends who were in the room with the treasury under George W. Bush. And when Paulson walked in and said, "Gang, here is the deal. You're going to take this and you're going to sign this paper." And they said, "Well, now, wait a minute here"" (4/20/2009). By standing as a mediator between the political elite and regular viewers, Beck assumes the role of the traditional journalists. However, it is how he presents these sources that departs from convention. Rather than offering the viewer a set of statements or facts retrieved from formal channels of communication, Beck offers elite information as transmitted and gained *interpersonally* presenting it in the form of an experience obtained through a "friend" in a social situation.

Due to the host-centric format and meaning structure of Fox News talk shows, the principal way in which Fox News hosts socially situate their knowledge is by referencing their own personal history. In an episode of *The Factor*, O'Reilly and guest, professor Lamont Hill, debate president Obama's tax policy. This quickly moves into a larger debate about whether the principles of redistribution, progressive taxation, and

government assistance promote a fair and meritocratic society. Beginning just after O'Reilly denounces the "death tax" as unjust, the debate continues as follows:

Hill: first of all, the death tax affects such a small slice of American people.

O'Reilly: it affects me (raising his voice as he says the word "me" while stiffly pointing his finger to his chest)

Hill: Yes, Bill. But I have to think about 97, 98 percent of the American people.

O'Reilly: They can compete the same way I did.

Hill: But how can you compete without health care, without housing, without....

O'Reilly: I did [pointing his finger back at himself again].

Hill: You absolutely did not.

O'Reilly: I competed every step of the way after I went to Marist College. I didn't have anything given to me by the government at all (stressing the last word).

Here, O'Reilly uses his own life story to base his claim that class mobility in America can be achieved without government intervention. Hill counters by listing various structural advantages that many workers do not have and that O'Reilly enjoyed growing up and is taking for granted. But before he can list another example, O'Reilly interjects, "No. What you've lost sight of is your background and my background. We have similar backgrounds." Hill responds in a conceding tone, "Absolutely." O'Reilly deligitimates Hill's use of percentages and examples of institutionalized inequalities ("what you've lost sight of") and calls upon Hill, the professor, to reorient his epistemological standards so as to return the locus of proof back to personal experience. Hill, being an African-American man of working-class origin, responds, "Absolutely," as to suggest that he either grants validity to this epistemological shift and/or reads O'Reilly's statements as a gesture of social solidarity vis-à-vis their common class background. In the following lines, O'Reilly further elaborates on his life story. As he does so his voice grows louder

and his body language becomes more engaged than at any other point in the discussion. “My parents didn't take a nickel from the government ever [O'Reilly leans toward Hill and raises his voice while elongating the word “ever”], okay?.....my father broke his back to send me to private school, all right? He didn't take any money. I never got a scholarship, I never got a loan. I worked at Carvel and painted houses” (3/10/2009). Unlike the leftist populist leaders in the first half of the twentieth-century who referenced their experience of growing up as working-class in order to critique capitalist relations of domination, O'Reilly references a working-class background to affirm the merit and fairness of modern capitalism. One sees this pattern across all three of Fox News's top-rated shows.¹⁰⁵

By citing these working-class histories in the course of a news broadcast and in the presence of political elites and media professionals, hosts confer a certain degree of prestige upon the viewer who is assumed to share a similar background. Moving beyond the content of these stories, in this section I've tried to make the argument that the very act of turning to personal experience in the midst of a political discussion

¹⁰⁵ In *Dignity of Working Men* (2000), Michele Lamont examines working-class perceptions of the “upper half” and shows how workers look down on members of the upper-class due to “the poverty of their interpersonal relations,” “their lack of straight forwardness,” “their excessive ambition.” However, one category of wealthy people workers tended to approve of, in the words of one electrician cited in Lamont's study, “the ones that worked they're way up but remember where they came from” (p. 110). By consistently referencing their working-class origins, Fox News hosts demonstrate to their audiences that they remember the place where they came from and that they haven't, despite their wealth and position of influence, lost their roots. For another example of this, in an episode of *Hannity*, star country singer and conservative activist, John Rich, breaks into a description of his working-class background during a panel discussion on the Wall Street bailouts. Following Rich, *Hannity* discloses, “You really touched a nerve here, and that is the America we grew up in. My father grew up poor. My father had to work and did paper routes to pay and help with his family growing up....it was a proud moment to get a 50 by 100 lot in Franklin Square, Long Island and raise his kids in a better situation then he had. Are people at home relating to, you know, trillions and trillions? [referring to the government bailouts] (3/24/2009)

conveys class identifications that associate the speaker with a working-class epistemic culture.

In the *Dignity of Working Men* (2000), Michelle Lamont studies the evaluative schemas that American working-class men use to draw boundaries between them and their class superiors. She notes how workers adopt standards of self-respect that are based on personal integrity mainly because “personal” integrity is mode of legitimation that is “available to all” (p. 108). In turn, she shows that workers tend to view forms of legitimation that involve prestige and ambition with “hostility” because they are exclusive sources of respect and imply a “zero sum game.” In giving epistemological priority to the knowledge one gains from their own or their family’s life experiences, a source of knowledge that is “available to all,” Fox News programs construct a ‘popular intellect’ and convey the “principle of conformity” underlying working-class culture and taste. However, in the next section, I will demonstrate how the popular intellect is given sharper, more tangible class-cultural connotations through the hosts’ performance of hostility to institutionally bestowed markers of intellectual distinction, i.e. credentials, degrees, and other signs of an elite education.

Anti-credentialism and the Class Politics of Educational Capital

One notable difference between left-leaning and right-leaning politicians and media figures is that while liberals tend to see educational achievement as a crucial source of public legitimacy, conservatives tend to either downplay their educational capital when they have it or, when they do not, wear their lack of it like a badge of honor. Consequently, when liberal figures measure their conservative counterparts by the criteria of legitimation that they apply to themselves, they inadvertently advance the

conservative movement's populist branding strategy. This was no more apparent than in the centrist and liberal media's treatment of vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin (an archetypal cultural populist politician if there ever were one). Like Sarah Palin, Fox News pundits anticipate criticisms of educational inadequacy and seize them as proof of both liberal elitism and of the authenticity of their working-class identities. Like other conservative talk media heavy weights such as Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck touts the fact that he is "not an expert" and that he never graduated college. By doing so, he makes a powerful claim to share, in the present as opposed to just by background, a class-cultural likeness with his imagined working and lower-middle-class audience, the majority of whom, in actuality, lack a college degree.

Because higher educational institutions play an important role in defining official culture, in constructing definitions of intelligence, and in reproducing class hierarchies overall, educational credentials are particularly contentious objects in Fox News programming. Furthermore, by expressing differences in types and volumes of cultural capital in stark ways, elite credentials (and the institutions they represent) serve useful symbolic functions by giving concrete meaning to the more subtle components of Fox News's representation of popular and professional intellectuals that I have previously covered, i.e. their aesthetic, dispositional, and epistemological components. Moreover, elite educational institutions provide a simple causal explanation for the existence of class-cultural differences. In the following section, I will demonstrate how anti-credentialist discourse contributes to Fox News's representation of a popular intellect and, lastly, how it relates to Fox News's larger populist representational strategy.

Standing in front of a colorful black board and before a table of props and assorted groceries, Beck finishes his argument about the interconnection

between the devaluation of the dollar and the rise in food prices. Following a slightly frustrated exhale, Beck leans closer to the camera and states, “look, I’m not an economist. I’m a high school educated guy. And maybe that’s why I can see things that other people can’t [in the media], because I don’t have that big ol’ head [that’s] been filled by the so-called experts...I try to figure it out myself.” (11/4/2010)

As opposed to approaching his lack of a college degree as a shortcoming, Beck asserts that it gives him an insight other, more credentialed political analysts, do not have. Furthermore, he suggests that formal erudition distorts one’s ability to evaluate the world and think clearly. In “At your Beck and Call,” once a regular segment on *The Factor*, O’Reilly features Glenn Beck on the program to debate the failure to anticipate the financial collapse. In their discussion, Beck implies that the crisis was not foreseen because the public and government were blinded by the experts.

Beck: You don't have to be a gigantic scholar. You don't...have to be a big brain like you Bill O'Reilly. What you have to have is common sense.

O'Reilly: But sometimes you have to grasp macroeconomics, for example.

Beck: Do you know why people didn't see this freight train coming?

O'Reilly: Why?

Beck: They didn't see the freight train coming with the economy because what they were doing was looking and saying, "No, no, no, but we have all these systems over here." It was a massive con game on themselves. (3/6/2009)

O’Reilly, like Beck, regularly performs distance from and hostility toward elite educational institutions. However, as evident in this exchange, O’Reilly places far more confidence in formal expertise than Beck. This is possibly due to the fact that O’Reilly himself holds several advanced degrees, including one from Harvard University. Because this educational distinction threatens his populist persona, O’Reilly deploys different representational tactics to obscure or nullify his credentials. In a recurring segment

where O'Reilly responds to viewer mail, he rebuts one viewer's charge of educational elitism by stating, "it's not my Harvard degree that makes me smarter sir, it's my degree from the school of hard knocks that gives me advantage"(12/5/2006). Similarly to Beck, O'Reilly regularly asserts the superior value of the knowledge gained by life experience over formal learning.

In an episode of *The Factor*, a discussion about the "mainstream media's" coverage of Sarah Palin unfolds into a debate about the nature of intelligence. O'Reilly contrasts the left's evaluation of Sarah Palin, a popular governor in Alaska, with Deval Patrick, a supposedly 'unpopular' Democratic governor in Massachusetts. In the discussion, O'Reilly sets up a rhetorical framework within which the two governors come to represent two competing definitions of intelligence. In a sarcastic tone, O'Reilly says, "Governor Patrick has a law degree from Harvard. So obviously, he's a smart guy, but his approval rating now stands at an embarrassing 36 percent and the state's in chaos. So Palin's dumb, but Alaska's running fine" (7/30/2009). By juxtaposing Palin's lack of an elite education with her "solid performance" and Patrick's elite credentials with his incompetence, O'Reilly asserts the superiority of utilitarian knowledge, while calling to question the association of an elite education with intelligence. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, Fox News programs often suggest that performance-based merit and utilitarian intelligence are native to the market and, therefore, are nearly exclusively exhibited by business people and others in the private sector.

In addition to celebrating utilitarian knowledge and street smarts, O'Reilly rescinds his own educational credentials by consistently representing a mutual antagonism that exists between him and educated elites, which persists as one of the longest recurring themes of his show. It is telling that academics are one of the top

groups to be portrayed as villains on *The Factor* according to one content analysis of the program (Conway et al, 2007). As previously demonstrated, most often O'Reilly's struggle against the educated elite is expressed through his opposition to prestige news outlets such as the *New York Times*.

This oppositional relationship also manifests in the way that O'Reilly, like Beck and Hannity, imagine their counter-audience. In one episode, O'Reilly claims, "there are people who really, really despise the network, and they do what? Most of them are television critics. You know, there are a lot of academics, a lot of professors, high-school teachers, things like that" (10/7/2009). While the groups O'Reilly cites imply different socioeconomic positions, the mutual social characteristic that binds his imagination of the Fox News "despisers" is their common possession of high educational capital. Fox News's emphasis on education-based class distinctions in their vision of the political field marks segments of the lower-middle-class whose members, including high-school teachers, have high cultural capital and low economic capital as being part of the elite power bloc. In turn, Fox News's deployment of education and taste-based schemas of class work to representationally align segments of the working-class with the nouveau riche and the business class by underscoring their mutual association with 'vulgar' taste and low cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, pp.176, 185). By selecting education as the fundamental distinction of class in the context of the worse economic downturn in eighty years, Fox News programming significantly deflected and obscured many of the socioeconomic inequalities that the Great Recession amplified and made more visible.

However, the discourse of anti-credentialism is not confined to Fox News or conservative politics. This discourse expresses sentiments that many non-college educated workers feel and appears in colloquial terminology for class that has been part

of American culture and the populist tradition long before Fox News emerged on the political scene. This is apparent when one considers how the word “elites,” one of populism’s core signifiers, has been used and collectively imagined. In his etymology of the word “elite,” Raymond Williams argues that by the mid-twentieth-century, the term started to move away from its previous association with ‘natural leadership’ and took on a more pejorative meaning. What is crucial is that not only did ‘elite,’ ‘elitist,’ and ‘elitism’ become associated with snobbish attitudes and social practices, but, Williams stresses, it began to simultaneously suggest a hostility toward institutions, particularly, educational ones that are believed to cultivate and guarantee the perpetuation of social elites (1985, pp. 112-115). While Williams locates this etymological shift in the postwar period (which corresponds to the beginning of McCarthyite and Wallaceite conservative populism), historian William Hogeland’s has emphasized the centrality of anti-credentialist themes in the rhetoric of late-nineteenth century populists. Hogeland (2010) argues that in contrast to liberals of the period whose, he writes, “hopes for social progress lay specifically in advanced formal education,” the populists of this era, “deemed advanced formal education and its resulting expertise tools for keeping ordinary people out of the halls of power” (para. 10). Raymond Williams’ etymology of “elitism” suggests a similar tacit theory of power and encapsulates the two main components of anti-credentialism. Anti-credentialism, like all discourses of populism, entails a larger narrative that envisions a societal conflict between the controllers of the dominant institutions and those marginalized by them (Laclau, 2006; Canovan, 1981). However, in anti-credentialism, educational institutions and institutions most occupationally respondent to educational capital (e.g. the news media, the courts, the political system, academia, the arts, philanthropic organizations) are the primary political targets.

In contrast to its hostile stance toward academic knowledge, in Fox News programming, business elites are framed as effective leaders whose knowledge and expertise is portrayed as organic and authentic, a product of the “real world.” As I’ll demonstrate in the next chapter, there is a striking contrast between the way Fox News programs critique expertise established through educational institutions and expressed by educational credentials and the way commentators exhibit utter deference to expertise that is established in business institutions and that is expressed through wealth accumulation and market position.¹⁰⁶ While Fox News hosts pose searing and sometimes insightful critiques of state-based technocratic leadership and rightfully highlight the condescending views many educated-professionals have of the mass public, Fox News programs unquestioningly suggests that corporate managers are the rightful vanguard of society.

In an episode of *The O’Reilly Factor*, O’Reilly and Neil Cavuto discuss, “the disconnect between average folks and Wall Street folks.” Contrasting Wall Street’s disfavor of Obama’s tax policy, O’Reilly says, “66 percent of Americans like the idea of raising taxes on those earning more than \$250,000 a year. Fifty-five percent say that levels the playing field, while thirty-nine percent believe it punishes hard work and success. So while the financial markets [financial elites] oppose President Obama, most of the folks are still with him.” Cavuto responds matter-of-factly, “The Wall Street folks and their view eventually become the Main Street folks’ view.” Instead of defending the “ordinary judgment” of the folks concerning tax policy, O’Reilly affirms Cavuto’s

¹⁰⁶ Bill O’Reilly is somewhat of an outlier in this respect. During the financial crisis, he occasionally called into question the wisdom of financial experts by exclaiming to one financial analyst, “why should the folks trust you?” However, these examples are exceptional and O’Reilly shares Beck and Hannity’s general deference to famous business leaders who appear on Fox News, including Jack Welch, Donald Trump and Steve Forbes.

condescending statement responding, “It [Main Street folks] takes them a little time to catch up” (3/5/2009).

The faith Fox News commentators place in the intellectual superiority of the business class is mirrored by the views that financial elites have of themselves. In her ethnography of Wall Street titled *Liquidated* (2009), Karen Ho details through extensive interviews the way in which investment bankers see themselves as the intellectual apex of society and regard the central characteristic of their industry as being “smartness” and exceptional talent. Ho argues there is a “culture of smartness” in the corporate world of investment banking that establishes a sort of circular, self-referential affirmation amongst financial elites. According to the logic of the members of this sector, they wouldn’t be investment bankers if they were not exceptionally intelligent and if they were not exceptionally intelligent they couldn’t be investment bankers.

Academia shares a similar faith in talent and elite intelligence that one finds in the world of finance. In her study on the evaluative practices that humanities and social science professors use in doing peer review assessments of grant applications titled *How Professors Think* (2009), Michele Lamont demonstrates how central the belief is in the culture and political economy of academia that excellence reveals itself and “cream rises.” In light of their pro-business politics and free market ideological stance, it is unsurprising that Fox News hosts like Neil Cavuto and O’Reilly would NOT be critical of the financial class’s alleged talent and expertise before the collapse of 2008 or blame the collapse on the immense hubris and inflated sense of intelligence the financial class exhibited in the lead up to the crisis (and still exhibits). Yet, as cultural critic Thomas Frank points out in a recent article titled, “Too Smart to Fail: Notes on an Age of Folly” (2012), the majority of the national press was equally blinded by the myth of Wall

Street's exceptional intelligence. Frank suggests that the predominant class and educational background of the press corps left them predisposed to place an overconfidence in technocratic authority and the abilities of "smart people" overall, whether this authority and these people rest in the business world, academia or the state. Frank and others waged this same critique at the Obama administration.¹⁰⁷

In a segment called "The Great American Panel," Hannity and guests panelists debate the AIG bonus controversy. At this time, many Democrats argued that since AIG was bailed out by government money there should be caps on the obscenely high bonuses and pay scales that AIG CEO's and executives were being given. Sandra Smith, a Fox Business Network analyst, attempts to justify the AIG bonuses by asking the rhetorical question, "how do you retain our *top talent* in this country? How do we attract talent? [If you don't pay such high salaries]." Liberal guest, Rebecca Diamond *does* recognize the "folly" in "the best and the brightest" logic of Smith and Hannity's argument. With a tone of outrage in her voice, she responds, "Attract talent? They [the talent] got us into this mess Sandra!" (3/31/2009).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ In *Confidence Men* (2011), veteran journalist Ron Suskind specifically critiques the Obama administration for its over-reliance on experts, especially financial experts, in its handling of the Recession. Rather than harnessing the popular discontent toward Wall Street and the widespread desire to significantly reform the regulatory environment of the financial industry, Suskind maintains, Obama tended to surround himself with financial experts and followed their advice, thus shielding, "Wall Street executives against these winds of cultural change" (p. 241).

¹⁰⁸ This exchange exemplifies that Fox News includes on their top programs liberal points of view that challenge and contradict a given segment or episode's preferred conservative interpretation of the event or issue being discussed. While the conservative voices overwhelmingly outnumber the liberal voices in Fox News programming and are constrained during debate by the hosts ability to cut them off, Fox News's top programs are often not given enough credit for their inclusion of liberal guests on a frequent basis and how this inclusion helps legitimate the network's claim to represent "balanced" reporting. Compared to MSNBC, a news network that comes closest to matching Fox News's partisanship, but on the liberal side, Fox News includes more oppositional voices and counter-party guests in its programming. However, Fox News's motivation for including liberal guests not only stems from the channel's desire to appear as balanced but also from its tendency to create confrontations and conflict, i.e. good television. In addition, contrary to a common critique of Fox News's liberal guests, there are several recurring

Chapter Two Conclusion

Outside the sphere of politics, an invested disposition, lay knowledge, and educational credentials are non-contentious cultural characteristics. However, when interpreted through Fox News's populist representational framework, these components are translated as symbols of political identity and serve the hegemonic function of constructing conservatives as 'the people' and the conservative agenda as the people's will.

Evidently, there is a concealed limit to Fox News's antagonism toward official culture. When looking at how Fox News programs treat conservative intellectuals and their research, one finds that the channel's hostility toward expertise and formal knowledge is ideologically and politically selective. In chapter five, I demonstrate how Fox News programs often function as public platforms for the conservative intelligentsia and work as popular interfaces for (conservative) intellectual culture. Nevertheless, an important way in which Fox News hosts attempt to establish their "Regular Guyhood," to use one columnist's term, is *not* by being anti-intellectual per se but by marginalizing professional class standards of intelligence and celebrating an alternative brand of intellectuality that "ordinary people" who didn't go to college can take part in and perceive as their own.

liberal figures on the channel that are not straw figures and push overs. Commentators like Sandra Smith, Dr. Caroline Heldman, and Dr. Marc Lamont Hill are exceptionally talented communicators who often give top hosts like Hannity and O'Reilly a run for their money in terms of debate prowess. Moreover, Dr. Heldman and Dr. Hill place themselves to the left of the Democratic leadership and do not simply argue from moderate, watered down leftist viewpoints. This, however, cannot be said for Glenn Beck's program. Beck rarely features liberal guests on his program and, as a result, is rarely challenged on air. Finally, even though many of the recurring liberal guests on Fox News can be impressive debaters, most present themselves as intellectuals and/or professionals and few use populist rhetorical styles and perform a working-class cultural disposition like the Fox News's hosts.

There is no doubt that Fox News represents a clear departure from the Cronkite era of television news and that one should keep a critical eye on the network's professionalism or the lack thereof. However, an analysis that focuses exclusively on the network's unprofessionalism tells one little about how Fox News has established its central presence in today's media culture. Many popular analyses of Fox News point to the ways in which the network has degraded and tabloidized journalism and politics (Pierce, 2002; Auletta, 2003; Collins, 2004; Kitty and Greenwald, 2005; Brock and Rabin-Havt, 2012). My contention is that one can learn more about Fox News's popular appeal by moving away from the question of how Fox News programs "dumb down" public affairs with infotainment and barking populism and toward the question of how the network attempts give a degree of intellectuality to lay, working-class culture.

Chapter Three: Job Creators, Crony Capitalists, and Subprime Parasites: Framing the Great Recession through the Moral Discourse of Producerism

People often oppose certain economic policies not because they have been or would be economically hurt by such policies, or even because they have any carefully calculated views about their economic efficacy, but because they disapprove on *moral* grounds of the assumptions on which they think the policies rest.

Richard Hofstadter (1965)

Explain...why other people on this planet *deserve* the fruits of my labor

—Bill O'Reilly (2009)

At an Ohio campaign stop in the 2008 presidential campaign, a brawny, bald headed man named Samuel Joseph Wurzelbacher, who would become known as “Joe-the-Plumber,” approached then candidate Barack Obama. Wurzelbacher voiced his concerns about the democratic candidate’s proposal to raise taxes on the highest income earners, arguing that a more progressive system of taxation would stifle his ambition to become a small business owner. He explained to the soon-to-be president, “the reason I ask you about the American dream, I mean I’ve worked hard. I’m a plumber. I work 10-12 hours a day and I’m buying this company and I’m going to continue working that way. I’m getting taxed more and more while fulfilling the American dream.” While Obama offered Wurzelbacher a long and measured answer to his

concerns, Obama's opponents in the McCain campaign the conservative media establishment jumped on one particular line from Obama: "I think when you spread the wealth around it's good for everybody" (Gewargis, 2008).¹⁰⁹

This encounter fueled a firestorm of debates about wealth redistribution and talk of "socialism" saturated the national media thereafter. Wurzelbacher was turned into a conservative media celebrity overnight. The great degree of attention Fox News gave to the "Joe-the-Plumber" incident is indicative of how symbolically important the small business owner is to Fox News's brand of conservative populism.

November 5, 2008—the day Barack Obama was elected president—Wurzelbacher appeared as a featured guest on *Hannity* (then called *Hannity & Colmes*). *Hannity*'s former liberal co-host Alan Colmes interviews Wurzelbacher and asks him why he opposes Obama's tax plan when it would serve his actual (as opposed to his potential) income-standing. Rather than offering an economic, interested-based explanation for his opposition, Wurzelbacher responds with a moral argument and says, "It goes against my principles. You know, I stand firmly on those. You know, taking someone else's hard-earned money and putting into my pocket...that's just stealing man."

¹⁰⁹ See (Gewargis, 2008; Rother 2008). For video see Wurzelbacher, J., & Obama, B. (2008). *Meet Joe Plumber/Obama talks to Joe Plumber (full video)*. [Web Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRPbCSSXyp0>.



Image 2.1: *Hannity* interviewing Joe-the-Plumber

In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Fox News programs claim to represent the working-class majority less by advocating policies that directly support their class interest and more by presenting Fox News pundits as the protectors and advocates of traditional moral-economic principles. In emphasizing the sanctity of skill, hard work and fair remuneration, these principles appeal to the deeply felt beliefs of workers. In this manner, moral and political connections are drawn between the business class and the working-class without evoking their divergent material interests.

I argue that Fox News programs draw these principles from one of the oldest and most enduring strains of the American populist tradition: “producerism.” From the colonial era through the nineteenth-century, producer republican rhetoric was a central frame through which American political parties and movements debated economics, labor relations and the distribution of wealth. In an attempt both to protect and to strengthen the hegemonic hold of conservative economic ideas in the face of crisis, Fox News’s coverage of the Great Recession readapts this traditional discourse into a

particular right-wing variant that I call “entrepreneurial producerism.”¹¹⁰ Producerism’s tendency to divide the social world into “the producers” and “the parasites,” exemplifies the antagonistic framework of all rhetorical forms of populism. In one episode of *Hannity*, Daniel Hanna, a recurring guest, lays out the basic rhetorical frame of Fox News’s populist critique of the Recession proclaiming, “you cannot carry on forever squeezing the productive bit of the economy in order to fund an unprecedented engorgement of the unproductive. You cannot spend your way out of recession or borrow your way out of debt” (5/19/2009). Echoing this more succinctly, a guest on *Glenn Beck* claims, “Stimulus forwards the indolent at the expense of the productive” (11/10/2009).

No longer overshadowed by the religious “culture war” and the nationalistic “war on terror” rhetoric that characterized Fox News’s W. Bush era programming, Recession era producerist rhetoric assumes a central position in the network’s programming discourse. This is not to say that producerism is new to twenty-first century conservative politics. As outlined in the introduction, the producer/parasite binary has been an important dimension of conservative populism since the Great Society and Civil Rights era, and was especially asserted during the Reagan administration with its racialized mythology of the Cadillac-driving, “welfare queen.” In relation to the rhetorical history of conservative talk media, in the early nineteen nineties, before Fox News was launched, producerist rhetoric was, and still is, regularly heard on conservative talk radio especially on its number one program: the *Rush Limbaugh Show*. Foreshadowing the

¹¹⁰ Few political analysts and critics use the term producerism to describe conservative populist discourse of the Recession era. However, two prolific columnists and political commentators have used the term to describe the rhetoric of the Tea Party movement. *The New Republic’s* John S. Judis (2010) and *New York Times* columnist David Brooks (2009) have used the term and they both, as I do, tie the term and its meaning to the populist rhetorical traditions of the nineteenth-century politics.

interpretative framework Fox News would use to cover the late-2000s Recession, in a 1993 broadcast Limbaugh states, “Defense spending and Reagan are not why America has problems it does today, but rather an ever-growing trend of taking from the productive and giving to those who don’t produce” (9/24/1993).¹¹¹ As evident in these examples and implicit in producerist signifiers themselves, producerist discourse includes a narrative component whereby a story is told about an idle, parasitic class that steals the wealth of an industrious class.

So who, according to Fox News, is the producing class? In an episode of *Glenn Beck*, Beck partially answers this question in recounting a conversation with his daughter. He tells the audience how his daughter heard on the radio that Obama’s tax policy would give a tax cut to 95 percent of Americans. “My daughter Willow said, “Ninety-five percent of Americans, right on, but what about the other five percent?” And I said, “Well, see, that other five percent—they are the ones that have money. They are the ones who create jobs and *create wealth* and they own businesses.” And she says, “Why would they be punished for their success?” And I thought the wisdom of a child - that is common sense” (1/19/2009).

Complementing this frame about who the wealth creators are, during the Recession Fox News hosts and commentators repeatedly argued that business owners and those that occupy the top rungs of the tax bracket are—by having the highest federal income tax—the ones who shoulder the biggest tax burden and thus contribute the most to government and all that it provides for the entire population. In short, Beck, like Fox News’s other top-rated hosts Sean Hannity and Bill O’Reilly, stresses over and

¹¹¹ Quote found in Chad Harris, Vicki Mayer., Catherine Saulino, & Dan Schiller (1996). The Class Politics of Rush Limbaugh. *The Communication Review*, 1(4), 545-564.

again that it is this elite group that produces the most value in society. This business class centric brand of populism that I refer to as entrepreneurial producerism can be seen as an informal or popular expression of supply-side economic theory that advances the familiar “trickle down” argument: lifting regulatory restraints on the business class and lowering taxes on the wealthy creates a stronger economy and thus serves the majority interest. However, differing from supply-side economic discourse, entrepreneurial producerism doesn’t merely offer a technical justification for organizing the economy (i.e. the tax and regulatory structure) around the interests of upper-income, business owners. Equally if not more important, entrepreneurial producerism provides a moral rationale for supply-side policies.

Fox News distinguishes the everyman producer from an elite above, but also from an underclass below. Historian Joseph Lowndes refers to this construction of the embattled middle as “the old Jeffersonian saw” (p. 153) and historian Michael Kazin has documented its presence in American political rhetoric since the colonial era (1998, p. 14). In Glenn Beck’s coverage of the Recession, he refers to his audience as “those people” who *did not* “take out loans that didn’t require proof of income” but are now being “forced to bailout” those who did (3/13/2009). Beck explains the economic crisis as partly the result of undisciplined borrowers and Democratic policies aimed at increasing home-ownership among low-income workers and racial minorities. In this way, Fox News’s framing of the Great Recession plays on preexisting racialized, anti-welfare state rhetoric that has been a central component of conservative populism since the 1960s.

In this chapter, I address how Fox News’s top-rated programs presented overextended homeowners as the parasites and the “welfare queens” of the Recession

era. In addition, I examine how Fox News programming aimed its sights upwards as well, deploying (though in highly selective and limited ways) forms of anti-corporate discourse in order to address and ideologically steer the popular discontent toward Wall Street and economic elites toward conservative, pro-business policies.

Fraught with profound contradictions, the successful deployment of entrepreneurial producerist discourse on Fox News programs is no easy task. My analysis examines the rhetorical framing techniques that Fox News programs utilize to conceal, redirect, and manage two core contradictions within the moral discourse of entrepreneurial producerism: first, how producerism can claim to speak for “the many,” while suggesting that the productive class is an embattled “few”; and second, how Fox News can frame the producing class as being an economically “successful” group and a victimized and marginalized group at the same time. Playing on these contradictions, one progressive blogger described Fox News’s Recession era rhetoric as “rich-guy populism” and liberals have wondered how it could be taken seriously by anyone (Reed, 2009). But I argue that it is moral rhetoric, not political economic reasoning, that allows Fox News’s top hosts to defend tooth and nail policies that only benefit the wealthiest citizens (e.g. Inheritance tax, Bush Tax cuts), attack institutions and policies that fight for wage increases (e.g. labor unions, minimum wage laws) and support draconian cuts to public services upon which the majority of workers depend. It is through employing the moral logic of producerism so important to the American working class that Fox News can claim to represent the common man and be “looking out for the little guy.”

In their interpretation of the Recession, Fox News’s programs often spoke of the collusion between government and Wall Street—two sectors that do not produce anything—as one of the major causes of the crisis. Their relationship is described on

the network as (bad) “crony capitalism,” and is distinguished from the (good) capitalism of producers, complicating in moral terms a class view of politics. In making this analysis, Fox News relies on themes and tropes about producers and parasites that have circulated in American political culture for centuries. In his book *Securing the Fruits of Labor* (1998), historian James L. Huston documents how, from 1760-1900, politicians and political movements in the United States explained the maldistribution of wealth and ‘unnatural,’ unjust forms of class hierarchy by referring to the “political economy of aristocracy” (PEA), attributing the maldistribution of wealth to a dysfunctional political system and not the economy. By PEA logic, government is captured and controlled by an idle, aristocratic class (i.e. a social elite) that enriches itself and its allies in select industries by expropriating the wealth of the producing class. Like the rhetoric of crony capitalism, eighteenth and nineteenth-century uses of PEA emphasized the corrupt nature of government-business collusions and political favoritism. PEA, in turn, draws on a Lockean, republican theory of property distribution that maintains a just society is one that distributes resources on the basis of what labor is contributed. It assumes that individual economic independence is the precondition to political freedom and the primary safeguard against tyranny. The other core component of PEA is how it relies on a labor theory of value, which maintains that all wealth is a result of productive human labor. The problem in politics is to define who contributes what amount of productive labor. In revolutionary era parlance, as Huston documents, these two tenets were joined and expressed by the phrase “the fruits of labor” and, as historians such as Sean Wilentz and Eric Foner have shown, became synthesized in the *producer republican* rhetoric of Jeffersonian and Jacksonian era politics. In turning to these residual discourses and narratives to interpret the Recession, Fox News’s top-rated programs

provided a moral logic for their advocacy for supply-side policies and opposition to Democratic, Keynesian policies, using a mode of reasoning about political morality that has deep cultural resonance. This strategy was successful, because this earlier American political discourse still informs, often in unrecognized ways, the underlying normative assumptions that are expressed in modern debates about class, work, and wealth distribution.

The Small Business Owner, the 'Forgotten Man' of Conservative Populism

In a "special" episode of *Glenn Beck* that aired March 13, 2009 titled "You Are not Alone," Beck begins the show back stage. The viewer hears the cheers of a studio audience that is off camera on the other side of black bleachers. He leans toward the camera and assumes an unconventionally close distance for a television news anchor. Visibly shaky, he pauses to laugh at himself indicating that he is about to tear up. Gathering himself, he proceeds with a monologue that, using a direct personal address, assumes the voice and perspective of the everyday person experiencing the Recession. In this "off camera" setting, Beck gives audiences an outline of Fox News's populist narrative of the Recession.

you've lived your life in a responsible way. You didn't take out a loan that didn't require any kind of proof of income, yet; now, you're being forced to bail those people out.....It's not about politics. You actually believe in something. And you thought for a while there, your politicians did as well, and now you kind of realize, well, maybe...they don't....When you come home after a hard day of work...All you want to do is just watch a little television....but every time you turn that television on, it seems like the whole world is spinning out of control...

The camera transitions into a documentary with Beck's narration. After listing various

international threats (e.g. Middle Eastern insurgents, Mexican drug traffickers, European rioters) that are accompanied by threatening, violence-laden video imagery, the documentary returns to the economic crisis at home.

Our companies faced new union mandates and global cap-and-trade and the second highest corporate tax rate in the world. All the while, politicians wonder why jobs are going overseas. Yet on the other side, some global corporations only see America as a market and you as a consumer. Meanwhile, over 4 million friends and neighbors have lost their jobs in the last four months alone. Names that we always thought described American strength, have stocks that are now worth less than a Frappuccino. And we're told they're too big to fail. Yet 70 percent of all jobs are created by the small businessman and nobody seems to even notice him. What happened to the country that loved the underdog and stood up to the little guy? What happened to the voice of the "*forgotten man*"? The "*forgotten*" man is you!

In January and February, the months leading up to the date of this broadcast, the Recession was inflicting its most severe damage. For months back to back, millions of jobs had been shed and historic numbers of foreclosures were continuing to cascade. In this context, Beck provides a narrative that attempts to makes sense of a world that must have felt for many viewers, at this moment particularly, to be "spinning out of control." Here, Beck voices the predominant themes and arguments about the Recession that appeared across Fox News's top-rated shows. The segment frames the small business owner as a person of moral virtue who is the downturn's central figure, its protagonist. The small business owner stands for economic productiveness ("70 percent of all jobs are created by the small businessman"). Fox describes him using the historic phrase "the Forgotten Man," representing the small business owner as politically disenfranchised, socially exploited and as the Recession's central victim. "What happened to the country that stood up for the little guy?," Beck says, "What happened to

the voice of the Forgotten Man?”

The small business owner is a celebrated figure in American culture, but this figure is, for different reasons, especially important to both working-class Americans and the conservative movement. For many workers, small business ownership is perceived as a more attractive and/or likely route to upward mobility than higher education.¹¹² Some leftist critics associate the working-class' identification with small business ownership with a petit-bourgeois worldview based on possessive individualism, the fetishization of private property and a desire to become a master of a small world (Perlman, 1928; Davis, 1984). What this you-too-can-be-a-capitalist type of analysis tends to overlook is how small business ownership can represent a utopian, moral-economic ideal that is particularly appealing to workers *because* of their class position as opposed to because of their misidentification as upper class or pre-rich. In addition to petit-bourgeois wealth, small business ownership represents a way to achieve freedom from managerial supervision and administrative evaluation and imagines an economic situation and status where one's labor, intelligence, and ability are seemingly only judged by the quality of one's individual skill, product or service as opposed to by one's qualifications or the internal politics of a given institution or workplace (Vanneman and Cannon 1987, pp. 83-87).

In terms of partisan politics, the virtue of the small business owner is invoked by politicians across the partisan divide. However, claiming to represent the voice of the

¹¹² Michele Lamont (2000) shows how white workers in United States more readily identify with those who have higher incomes than those with higher educations. She posits that one reason workers are drawn to avenues of achievement defined by wealth over education is because, she writes, “the former is perceived as more within reach than the latter and can help workers to locate themselves above the college-educated” (p. 104).

For scholarship that demonstrates and discusses attitudes toward and aspirations for small business ownership amongst workers see (Chinoy, 1955; Palmer, 1957; Robinson and Kelley, 1979; Jackman and Jackman, 1985; Vanneman and Cannon, 1987).

small business owner is especially crucial to conservative brands of economic populism such as entrepreneurial producerism. The intermediary position of the small business owner offers conservatives a way to bridge the economic interest of the business class and the working-class and in doing so gives free market economy theory a popular-democratic appeal. Because definitions of small business ownership are wide ranging, vary by industry, and, like all class categories, are politically contested and ideologically loaded, this definitional ambiguity facilitates attempts to economically align the working and business class by obscuring the social and economic distance between them.¹¹³ By

¹¹³ Because there are political benefits to aligning one's agenda with the small business owner, the process of defining who is and who is not a small business owner is contentious and contradicting. Arriving at a precise definition of who counts as a small business owner is even made more difficult by the sheer complexity of the tax code and by the fact that there is a multiplicity of sources of income to consider and there are different, sometimes competing indexes for measuring business size. For example, the U.S. Small Business Administration uses different criteria to measure what counts as a "small" business for different industries. For mining and manufacturing any business that is a sole proprietorship or limited partnership with less than 500 employees is considered "small." For retail and other service industries, the main measurement is annual gross income or receipts and, here, the SBA considers a business that makes less than seven million annual receipts "small." By either measurement, it is hard to imagine that a person who owns a business with 500 employees or one whose business grosses close to seven million a year has an income level that approximates workers in the lower-middle-class or 95 percent of the population for that matter.

However, if one defines a small business owner as anyone who reports income gained by self-employment, one finds that—according to the 2007 U.S. Census—the median annual income for these filers was 31,246. http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032008/perinc/new09_001.html. The top career websites offer equally low wealth indexes for small business owners as well. In 2008, Payscale.com user generated reports place the average salary for small business owners between 36,000 and 75,000 a year. Careerbuilder puts the average at 36,266. These numbers paint a very different picture of the socioeconomic identity of small business owners than SBA's categories, one that is closer to the working-class. However, these numbers hide the ways in which small business owners can hide their true income by not claiming cash income or through filing deductions on various kinds of personal or lifestyle expenses.

Like other conservatives, Fox News's top rated hosts tend to argue that small business owners are mainly people who occupy the top tax brackets. To support this claim, a U.S. Treasury Department report in 2007 found that 75 percent of the top bracket tax payers report some type of "non-wage" income such as from a sole proprietorship, a partnership or an S corporation. <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/hp500.aspx>. If one defines any person that files "non-wage" income as a small business owner, then indeed one can draw an association between small business owners and the rich. The problem with this metric is that a whole variety of things can be considered "non-wage" income from law firms to investment banking practices, things one doesn't conventionally associate with a mom and pop business or a

placing such a dubious, transitional, and often unstable socioeconomic position as the linchpin of the entire U.S. economy, Beck's Recession narrative has the effect of blurring market stratifications and socioeconomic differences from top to bottom.

Returning to the clip, the interplay between Beck's verbal rhetoric and the visual images that follow his introduction represent and play with the class dualism of the small business owner. On one hand, the program presents the interests of small business and big business as essentially equivalent. The small businessman is positioned against policies such as "union mandates," "cap-and-trade," and a high "corporate tax rate." While these policies have only a remote and indirect (arguably no) relation to small business, they are traditionally opposed by large-scale corporations. On the other hand, in Beck's documentary, the small business owner is a little guy as well—particularly in relation to Wall Street. The documentary juxtaposes images of stock tickers and shiny building plaques that bare the names of the major banks that were bailed out by the

corner store.

In his book *Talking Right* (2006), Geoffrey Nunberg criticizes the way in which George W. Bush's administration played with tax filing categories and the slippage that many socioeconomic indicators entail in order to obscure the definition of small business ownership. Nunberg writes, "According to the White House...the estate tax falls most heavily on small businesses and family farms. But when Republicans talk about "small business owners," the term includes not just the proprietor of a dairy farm or a family hardware store, but anybody who has any income at all from a sole proprietorship or partnership. By that standard, "small business owners" include a corporate CEO who rents out his ski condo for a couple weeks a year or a million-dollar-a-year network anchor who earns a few thousand dollars in speaking fees, not to mention a U.S. president who earns a few hundred dollars in income from an oil and gas company he has a small interest in" (p. 56).

Contradicting the conservative claim that the majority of small business owners are in the top tax bracket, the Tax Policy Center analyzed IRS data in March of 2009 and found that filers in the top tax bracket only earned 28.4 percent of their income from business-type sources. <http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/numbers/displayatab.cfm?DocID=2241> The Tax Policy Center demonstrated that only 8.9 percent of individuals who report small business income have household income over 250, 000 and less than 2.0 percent are part of the top two tax brackets. These numbers contradict conservative arguments that were repeated throughout the 2008 presidential campaign and throughout the Recession that president Barack Obama's tax policy and proposal to repeal of the Bush era tax cuts for top earners will increase the tax burden of small business owners. For more on this, see (Klein, 2009).

government (Citibank, Morgan Stanley, JP Morgan, AIG) with a sequence of images of worn down, small business establishments (see image 2.2 left side). One image shows a small store in a strip mall; another shows a house that was converted into a corner store; the last shows a store that appears to be located on a main street of a small town (see image 2.2 right side). On the fronts of these businesses, the viewer sees banners that read “going out of business sale,” “clearance sale.”



Image 2.2: “too big to fail” banks and beleaguered small businesses

Cued with the line “and no body seems to notice him [the small business man],” the viewer is given a sequence of shots showing a small bakery, a man working at a car wash, and an older couple tending a produce stand, the proverbial “mom and pop” (see image 2.3).



Image 2.3: “mom and pop” produce stand

The sequence constructs the small business owner as everyman or woman through the locations, building appearance and size of the stores, and by the mundane and unglamorous character of the small businesses that are shown (e.g. car wash). The small business owner is presented as living in and being from the same working-class social world as the average American and assumed viewer.

Parasites from Above: Political Elites and Crony Capitalists

By showing images of small businesses going bankrupt (e.g. “clearance sale” signs) just after Beck speaks of 4 million workers who had lost their jobs, Beck suggest that small business owners carry the economic burden of the Recession that presumably the Fox audience is experiencing.¹¹⁴ In roughly the same moment of the documentary where job losses are cited and small business bankruptcies are visualized, Beck says in a resentful tone, “Yet, we’re told they’re too big to fail,” referring to the bank bailout. In

¹¹⁴ As a real world referent to this, in a *New York Times* article titled “How Many Small Business Will Go Broke During the Recession?,” published in June of 2009, columnist Scott A. Shane demonstrates, using data taking from the American Bankruptcy Institute, how businesses bankruptcies skyrocketed in 2008 and 2009. Retrieved from <http://boss.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/22/how-many-entrepreneurs-will-go-bankrupt-during-the-recession/>.

the images and in Beck's comments about "too big to fail," one sees how Fox contrasts the small business owner to "big" businesses on Wall Street. Unlike the small business owner and worker who must accept the devastation of bankruptcy and/or job loss, banks are rescued and propped up by the government. Business is not the problem. It is crony capitalism.

In the "You Are not Alone" segment, the viewer is shown one of the dominant ways in which Fox News aligns workers with small businesses (and by extension economic producers overall) during the Recession. Workers and small business owners are framed as sharing a common economic situation because they lack government support and political influence. They are defined against financial elites whose power is based in political patronage and whose wealth is gained through government enabled parasitism and dependency. In this way, Fox News's representation of the liberal "Other" is depicted as a faction of the power bloc that stands over the conservative populist subject and as a segment (often a racialized one) of the popular masses that stands below it. This is evident in the way Fox News programs uses the word "bailout" and the word "welfare" interchangeably. In a later moment in the "You Are not Alone" episode, Beck interviews Chris Gardner, an African-American man wearing a business suit. Gardner is labeled by the banner graphic underneath his video window as the man who "Inspired movie *Pursuit of Happiness*" and "Self-Made Millionaire." Beck tells Gardner, in a slightly cautious tone and cadence, "I wanted to talk to you because right now, people are [saying], if you don't believe in, you know, big government or, you know, bailing people out or welfare, you're a hate-monger. You were a guy who had nothing. What would have happened to you if somebody would have bailed you out?" Gardner responds with a grin, "I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you."

In another moment of the “You Are not Alone” episode, Beck raises a newspaper cover, showing a picture of the disgraced financier Bernie Madoff. He says, “look at the newspapers today. Here is Madoff going to jail. On the “New York Times,” here’s a story about how Congress was meeting with banks behind the scenes and....Maxine Waters’ [a Democratic congress woman] husband was on the board of directors at one of these banks....we can’t trust anyone.” Arrested for the largest financial fraud in U.S. history in months after the financial collapse, Madoff is evidence of the corrupt quality of the economic system. But Madoff also poses a danger for Beck’s free market ideology. Madoff's story could also be used to highlight the perils of under-regulated capitalism. So, Beck quickly turns to the Maxine Waters’ story, and evokes a PEA logic. Like Madoff, Water’s husband is an elite banker (“a board member”), but one who, it is suggested, enriched himself and avoided the consequences of his company’s failure through political connections and bailout money (i.e. TARP). But while Madoff’s moral transgression in the private sector is made accountable in a seemingly cut and dried way (“here is Madoff going to jail”), economic elites like Waters’ husband are represented as actors who can commit equivalent transgressions but, do so, due their public-sector connections, without receiving any repercussions.

It is important to note that O’Reilly’s interpretation of the economic crisis differed from Hannity and Beck in that O’Reilly at times did account for the role that corporate greed and deregulation played in causing the economic downturn. However, O’Reilly’s final analysis places the blame on cronyism and political favoritism and thus denies any critique of the conservative economic tenets that have dominated policy circles for the last thirty years. In an episode of *The O’Reilly Factor*, O’Reilly uses the General Electric corporation and its current CEO Jeffrey Immelt to exemplify the immorality of the current

economic system.

The reason the guy [Jeffrey Immelt] has not been fired is that he has GE's board of directors in his pocket because he gives them lavish perks. This is why Americans can no longer trust the stock market. It's not based on performance. It's based on cronyism.

There are thousands of Immelts running companies right now. CEOs who are ruining their operations, while stockholders lose billions. So while President Obama wants the taxpayers to bail out the economy, the gangsters on Wall Street are still largely held unaccountable. Yeah, the Senate passed the stimulus package today, but the public remains deeply suspicious.

By the way, guess who appointed Jeffrey Immelt as one of his economic advisors? Hi there, President Obama. And guess which network used its power to get President Obama elected? That would be NBC News, owned by General Electric. Does that sound like change we can believe in? (2/10/2009)

In this clip O'Reilly's includes one of Fox News's media rivals and offers a PEA narrative whereby business elites rig the economic system in their favor by leveraging Democratic politicians with their media influence. This offers an example of how O'Reilly incorporates the PEA rhetorical framework into Fox News's preexisting network self-narrative of an insurgent, populist news outlet struggling against the "elite," "mainstream" media that, on Fox News, is regularly epitomized by NBC News and the *New York Times* (see chapter one). In addition, one sees how O'Reilly invokes and then strategically conflates the very real role that social capital and favoritism play in private businesses and corporations with the relationships of political graft and collusion he suggests exists between GE, NBC news, and Obama's economic advisory committee.

In a March 25, 2009 episode of *Glenn Beck* that aired twelve days after the "You Are not Alone" episode, a similar redirecting technique is employed by Beck. In this episode, Beck interviews country singer, John Rich, a man who vigorously campaigned for Republican presidential candidate John McCain. In addition, Beck has Rich perform

his recent hit, “Shuttin’ Detroit Down,” a pro-auto-industry and anti-Wall Street (which he would perform again roughly a month later on the *Hannity* show’s live broadcast at the Atlanta Tea Party protest). In the interview, Rich voices deep anger over a story he heard about a Merrill Lynch CEO spending a million dollars to redecorate his office. Rich goes onto describe the message of his song. He says to Beck, “in the real world they’re shutting us down while the bosses are taking bonus pay and jetting out of town.” Rich echoes populist anger about CEO greed and corporate irresponsibility, and obliquely critiques the AIG executive bonus controversy that erupted in the prior week (a controversy that stands as one of the Recession’s biggest news stories⁹). Sensing the anti-capitalist implications of Rich’s song and comments, Beck attempts to reframe the anger. He attempts to control the situation by immediately following Rich’s anti-corporate comments with the question, “do you include Washington in that?” Rich responds, “Absolutely.”¹¹⁵

Reflecting the way in which Fox News’s deployment of producerism selectively channels Recession-based grievances within and across different socioeconomic groups, in his article “Rethinking Chartism” (1983), Gareth Stedman Jones demonstrates a similarly discursive characteristic was present in the rhetoric of the working-class Chartist movement in the UK during the mid-nineteenth-century. With Chartist populism, he writes, “The distinction was not primarily between ruling and exploited classes in an economic sense, but rather between the beneficiaries and the victims of corruption and

¹¹⁵ It is notable that in this *Glenn Beck* episode, when John Rich performs “Shuttin’ Detroit Down” he simply dedicates the song to “hard working Americans.” However, after performing the song a month later on April 15th, 2009 on *Hannity*’s live broadcast from the Atlanta, Georgia Tax day Tea Party protest, one sees how Rich modifies his dedication. Both at the Tea Party protest and at a later performance of the song at the 2009 Country Music Awards, Rich changes his dedication to “hard working AND tax paying Americans” in order to better fit Fox News and the Tea Party movement’s emphasis on tax payers and government spending. This departs from his initial emphasis and the video of the song’s emphasis, which is on autoworkers and corporate greed.

monopoly political power. The juxtaposition was in the first instance moral and political, and dividing lines could be drawn as much within classes as between them” (p. 169).

Parasites From Below: the Narrative Shifts from the Financial Collapse of 08’ to the Stimulus Debate of 09’ but the Scapegoats Remain the Same

Interestingly, during Fox News’s coverage of the financial crisis in 2008 the sharp moral edge and populist posture that characterize Fox News’s coverage of the stimulus debate was largely absent. In the fall of 2008, the dominant story-line that Fox News asserted about the economic downturn was a narrative that blamed the crash of the subprime mortgage market and by extension the entire financial crisis on ill-conceived Democratic policies that supposedly “forced” banking institutions to lower lending standards to in order to help minority and low-income communities attain mortgages. The policies that were particularly scapegoated were the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 and the more recent policies of government-sponsored mortgage companies Freddie Mae and Fannie Mac, both of which were designed to extend access to home loans for traditionally discriminated upon, economically disadvantaged groups.¹¹⁶ In

¹¹⁶ There are two caveats to this. While this narrative fairly represents the interpretation Hannity, Glenn Beck and the majority of Fox News pundits consistently asserted about the cause of the crisis, Bill O’Reilly’s interpretation tended to be more nuanced. O’Reilly frequently cited the lack of “government oversight” as a cause of the crisis. However, by oversight, he was careful to mean better monitoring of the financial sector as opposed to being caused by the lack of legal regulations and limits on types of trading practices. In comparison to his peers, he also more frequently cited corporate greed as a cause of the crisis often referring to financial CEOs involved in the crisis as “greed heads.” Yet, as much as these sources of causation, he repeated the same story about Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and the Community Investment Act. O’Reilly as much as his Fox News peers, scapegoated Senator Barney Frank for presiding over the House Committee on Financial Services during the subprime meltdown. It is notable that of all the figures and individuals involved in the financial crisis *The O’Reilly Factor* could’ve targeted and staged to produce one of O’Reilly’s famous, ratings-boosting confrontations, O’Reilly reserved his most heated attack for Barney Frank when he appeared on the show.

The other major caveat is that O’Reilly, Hannity and Beck did at times condemn and blame financial institutions and they even occasionally framed the bailout of the banks (i.e. Toxic Asset Relief Fund, TARP) as a crony capitalist version of theft. However, compared to the story

essence, Fox News's causation narrative was a story of how government elites and their base supporters ruined the economy due to, at the top, a blind commitment to liberal statist ideology and, at the bottom, the unintelligent and "undisciplined" character of subprime borrowers, who were implicitly coded as non-white. Though not explicitly called welfare, Fox News's causation narrative racialized these policies by frequently describing them as "redistribution" and "affirmative action." At the same time, the racial codings of Fox News's coverage of the financial crises dovetailed with its framing of Obama's presidential campaign because it attributed Obama's political appeal and the cause of the crisis to the same source: welfare policies and the nonwhite communities that benefit from them. In a September 1, 2008 episode of *The Factor*, O'Reilly suggests that if Obama wins he will do so because of Hollywood support and because, "he'll win among minority voters. And his entitlement message is powerful" (9/1/2008).

While Fox News's causation narrative blames the recession on the liberal opposition, it faults them primarily in terms of their incompetence and ignorance as opposed to their immorality and aggression. However, once a Democratic president officially took power and the largest most affirmative response to the crisis was moved forward, one sees how Fox News begins to increasingly structure their interpretation of late-2000s recession around a clear and singular moral transgression: theft. And because the theme of theft implies a narrative of victimization and a visceral image of assault, Fox News's early 2009 narrative does what the network's 2008 causation narrative failed to do, it provided a way to for its viewers to see the Recession through a populist mode of identification that could capture the feeling of being under siege in the

about Democratic housing policies for poor, minorities, this narrative was only a sub-plot. But more importantly, as mentioned earlier, Fox News's coverage of the Recession consistently presented the bailouts of the banks as equivalent to welfare or as a type of welfare. This way anti-financial sector discontent is conflated with and those directed at *all* government assistance.

face of economic disaster. Exemplifying the transition of Fox News's causation narrative to the 2009 anti-stimulus narrative, in a February 18, 2009 episode of *Hannity*, the day after the Stimulus Act had officially been passed, host Sean Hannity tells his guest, "for the average American sitting back here tonight...you know, people who get up every morning, shovel coffee down their throat, give their kids a shower, they wash them up, they comb their hair, they send them to school, they work fourteen hours a day, they obey the laws, they played by the rules...Now they're going to pay the bill for the mortgages of people who are not responsible. And these banks were forced to make these loans by government because of redistribution policies...They're on the hook to pay other people's mortgages?" His guest, Governor of South Carolina, Mark Sanford responds, "you get to be the sucker at the birthday party with this kind of approach, because you look at the bulk of all mortgages, in fact, they are being paid by the very people you just alluded to, who are living by the rules. And there is a *moral hazard* component."

On February 19, 2009, the very next day, a far more famous exchange occurred on cable news during the broadcast of a morning business news program on CNBC called *Squawk Box*. In what has since been called the "rant heard around the world," financial analyst Rick Santelli called for, in half joking manner, a "Chicago Tea Party" protest and in so doing coined the name of the already growing conservative protest movement that had been previously describing its events as "porkulous protests." In his impassioned speech amongst fellow traders on the floor of the Chicago Stock Exchange, Santelli's Tea Party defining speech echoes almost exactly the narrative Hannity and Sanford expressed the prior day. With fellow traders cheering him on in the background, Santelli challenges, "Why don't you put up a website to have people vote on the Internet

as a referendum to see if we really want to subsidize the losers' mortgages; or would we like to at least buy cars and buy houses in foreclosure and give them to people that might have a chance to actually prosper down the road, and reward people that could carry the water instead of drink the water.” Teleconferencing through a video window, Santelli tells the host of *Squawk Box* while turning to the applauding day traders around him, “This is America!” Then, producing the main sound bite that would be used across the national news media and be especially replayed on Fox News, he asks the crowd of traders, “How many of you people want to pay your neighbor’s mortgage that has an extra bathroom and can’t pay their bills? Raise their hand. President Obama, are you listening?” The host of *Squawk Box* responds to Santelli sarcastically, “how about we all stop paying our mortgage,” then says in a more serious tone, “it’s a *moral hazard*.”

Both Hannity and Santelli give variations of the forgotten man narrative that is repeated across Fox News programs during the Recession, that is, a story of an “average,” economically productive citizen (e.g. “they work fourteen hours a day,” those that “carry the water”) who is coerced by the government to financially support irresponsible and unproductive citizens (e.g. those who only “drink the water”). As evident in this language, this variation of the forgotten man narrative relies on the same producer/parasite binary and theft narrative of the political economy of aristocracy (PEA) outlined in previous section. However, unlike the crony capitalist narrative where the government uses the state to expropriate the wealth of the producers and to favor particular industries and corporations, this component of Fox News’s forgotten man narrative emphasizes how the state funnels wealth to an undeserving, parasitic class below in exchange for partisan loyalty and political patronage.

Even in the bill’s prospective form before it was brought to congress, Fox News’s

top programs were framing the stimulus act as not something to designed to kick start economic activity but as, to use the words of Dick Morris, a recurring guest on *The Factor*, a “Trojan horse” for transforming America into a “welfare-oriented society,” or, as O’Reilly puts it in the same conversation, a “hyper-Sweden” (1/29/2009). By framing progressive economic policies for addressing the crisis as essentially nothing but a Democratic ploy to expand government welfare programs, these policies, like Fox News’s framing of the subprime mortgage crisis, took on the racial connotations of welfare.

This brings me to the other crucial component of Fox News’s forgotten man narrative, which the way government assistance and intervention is framed through the dichotomy of the deserving/undeserving.¹¹⁷ Through the ambiguous economic figure of the small business owner, Fox News’s top programs seek to compare the economic hardships of the wealthy and the business-class with those felt by wageworkers that also identify with the private sector and see themselves as producers. However, only so much traction can be gained through this economic comparison especially when Fox News’s top programs defend policies like the Estate Tax that only an benefit exceptionally, wealthy elite and present Rick Santelli, a stock broker, as the image of populist outrage. In a moment of extreme wealth inequality the likes of which haven’t been seen since the early twentieth-century, it is not easy to present the wealthy and the business-class as embattled and suffering. Drawing attention to the theme of economic

¹¹⁷ In their book *The Tea Party and the Remaking of the Republican Conservatism* (2012), Vanessa Williamson and Theda Skocpol’s extensive interviews of Tea Party activists demonstrate the prevalence of this frame in the interviewees’ responses to questions concerning government programs. As they show, unlike the leadership of the major Tea Party organizations and the leadership of the Republican Party, the Tea Party rank and file overwhelmingly support government programs such as Social Security and Medicare. And they consistently rationalize their support for certain “big government” programs because they argue that these program supports “deserving” citizens (pp. 45-83).

hardship is potentially problematic for Fox News's political agenda overall because historically political rhetoric that foregrounds economic hardship has been used to justify progressive policies for greater government intervention, raising taxes on the rich, and increasing public aid and services, the very policies Fox News programming opposes.

One way Fox News's top programs deal with this challenge is by constructing a distinction between two kinds of economic hardship. The forgotten man's hardship, that the audience is invited to identify with, is presented as an unwarranted form of hardship, while the hardship of the "remembered man," a person favored by government, is a deserved hardship. While one form of hardship is presented as being caused by an act of theft that is unjustly brought upon a virtuous, productive person, the other is presented as being the self-inflicted result of poor decisions and, most importantly, a lack of work ethic and moral character. By recognizing this framework, one comes to realize that Fox News's coverage of the Recession is as much about asserting an understanding of *how* to evaluate moral virtue and how to identify *who* is worthy of public concern as it is about measuring the efficacy of the Obama administration's economic policies. By making the policy debate over how to address the economic crisis partly into a debate about economic deservingness, the issue of wealth inequality and the theme of economic hardship can be selectively engaged and selectively obscured.

In a segment of *The Factor* titled "Socialism and the Economy," O'Reilly says to liberal guest Marc Lamont Hill, "now I want to explain, because we got a lot of mail on this, a ton of mail on this, why other people on this planet *deserve* the fruits of my labor?" Hill's response is interesting in that it questions O'Reilly's assumption that his wealth and success are merely the product of his individual labor and goes on to point out the misalignment between conservatives' claim to represent Christian moral principles and

their, in terms of government policy, seeming indifference to the poor.¹¹⁸ After some discussion O'Reilly maintains that he doesn't mind paying taxes but he argues that, "income redistribution is something else other than taxes." He goes on to explain, "it's basically above and beyond your fair share, which I'm willing to pay, all right, and I'd say 40 percent to 50 percent of my paycheck is fair...Above and beyond that, Barack Obama and you and others say no, you have more of an obligation to then social engineer people who hadn't gotten educated, who don't work hard, who maybe were addicted for 30 years of their life, maybe they're clean now. Okay?" (3/10/2009). While technically all forms of progressive taxation are redistributive in nature, O'Reilly's distinction

¹¹⁸ Hill's direct response to this question in the episode points to a key problem with producer republicanism. Hill tells O'Reilly, "so the bulk of the fruit will go to you. If you work hard, and you get educated or you find a business opportunity, you do whatever you need to do to be successful in this country. You will enjoy the fruits of your labor. However, that doesn't happen in a *vacuum*. Your success doesn't happen in a vacuum. There are other people around you." While Hill's point gets set aside as the conversation shifted, later in the discussion O'Reilly comes back to it and suggests only his parents helped him and stresses how he and his parents didn't "take a dime from government." Hill's comments about how O'Reilly's success and wealth accumulation did not "happen in a vacuum," mirrors critiques Marxist theorists and socialists have made of Lockean, individual conceptions of labor and property that have long been hegemonic in American culture. For Marxist theorists, individual conceptions of labor are problematic because they deny the reality that the creation of value by labor is always created through social relationships and collaborative action. Marxist political philosophers and political scientists such as G.A. Cohen, C.B. Macpherson and John Roemer have written extensively about the "fiction" of "self-ownership," autonomous labor and individual value creation. See (Macpherson, 1962; Cohen, 1995; Roemer, 1998).

Feminist writers and activists since the Progressive era have been making similar critiques and have, through the issue of uncompensated domestic labor, stressed the way in which what seems like individual labor and wealth creation is undergirded by gendered social relations of labor that are often unacknowledged. Second wave feminist theorists and activists of 1960s and 70s especially drew attention to the fallacy of independent labor stressing how the wealth accumulated by male labor in the "public" arena of the market is supported by and dependent on the "private" female labor of the domestic arena, a labor that is, unlike male labor, predominantly unrecognized as productive labor and thus often goes unpaid. See (Friedan, 1963; Benston, 1980; Eisenstein, 1979; Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1979; Hochschild, 1989; Dalla Costa and James, 1973).

Likewise, historians of the Populist Party and the nineteenth-century working-class like Bruce Palmer, Lawrence Goodwyn and Herbert Gutman have argued that the individual, Lockean conception of property and labor that underpinned 19th and early 20th century producer republican ideology hindered an ability to grapple with and explain the structural, systematic, and institutional quality of industrial capitalism. See (Goodwyn, 1978; Palmer, 1980; Gutman and Berlin, 1987).

between “redistributionist policies” and regular tax policy is moral one. He suggests the former aids those without work ethic and self-discipline and the later serves worthy individuals and programs.

Later in the segment one sees how O’Reilly articulates this framework of deserving and undeserving hardship with entrepreneurial producerism’s valorization of the wealthy and the forgotten man’s narrative of theft. O’Reilly states, “The one percent pays more than 50 in income to the Feds. That’s way skewed, but it’s all right because we have the money. And I love my country. And I want it to have a strong defense. And I want it to have a good infrastructure. What I don’t want is when I die you coming into my house, taking the stuff I’ve already paid taxes on out of my house to give it to somebody I don’t know who may not deserve it.” Hill smirks as if in disbelief that the Estate Tax is the policy O’Reilly would cite to make a point about national tax policy and economic justice. Hill says, “first of all, the death tax [aka the Estate Tax] affects such a small slice of American people.” O’Reilly interjects and says raising his voice, “it effects me!” This exchange demonstrates how O’Reilly is able to take a policy that exclusively benefits the wealthy, something one might assume would be a liability for a person making an argument about economic injustice and turns it into a clear and compact example that captures the main producerist themes and moral lines of reasoning for Fox News’s overall opposition to progressive economic reforms.

Here, O’Reilly describes taxation as equivalent to home intrusion and burglary—after one’s death no less—and in doing so creates a vivid image of theft and tyrannical government. The immorality of this theft is heightened by stressing the unworthiness of the assumed recipients of government assistance (i.e. “somebody I don’t know” “people...who don’t work”). Making this transfer of wealth even more immoral, O’Reilly

frames Obama “redistributionist” policies as victimizing the most virtuous members of the national community. In framing the debate over Obama’s potential (not actual) tax policy in terms of how it personally affects his own life (“It affects me!”), O’Reilly becomes a stand in for top-income earners and thus represents them as a meritorious group that comes from the same humble background as O’Reilly—and implicitly the viewer—but, like O’Reilly, rose to wealth through talent and hard work. Lastly, O’Reilly amplifies the immorality of increased taxation on the rich suggesting that they carry the biggest economic burden for the national community (“the top one percent pays more than 50 in income”). What is unquestioned and implicit in O’Reilly and other Fox News’s hosts repeated statements about the wealthy paying the highest Federal income tax rate is that their high income is an indication of productive labor and hard work. Therefore, in having the highest income, O’Reilly suggest that the wealthy are the chief producers of society but what do they produce exactly?

“You Say Rich, I Say Job Creator”: Reinterpreting the Labor Theory of Value and the Working-class/business class Alignment

Throughout Fox News’s coverage of the Recession, hosts and pundits across the programs equally refer to the rich as “job creators,” and this term is very important because it is what is used on Fox to define businessmen as producers and part of the laboring class. In an episode of *Hannity* in which Democratic congressman Anthony Weiner asks host Sean Hannity, “do we really need to give millionaires and billionaires a tax cut?” Hannity responds, “you use this word millionaires and billionaires, it sounds pejorative to me...you say rich, let me use another term for rich, job creator, taxpayer” (12/14/2010). Recognizing how Weiner’s income-based descriptions of the rich highlight

their extreme class difference from Fox viewers, Hannity attempts to reinstate their *moral* standing with the working-class by stressing their identity as “job creators” and economically productive people. In a September 16, 2008 episode of *Hannity*, aired a day after the largest financial institutions had collapsed, Hannity defends the wealthy saying to his guest how—in all his years of doing working-class jobs—he, “never got a job from a poor person.” In Beck’s segment described above, one can also see how the program aligns the small business owner with the upper-class by being described them both as job creators, and by giving a similar moral standing to all business owners whatever the business size. Sharing a common identity as employers, the car wash owner and the couple selling produce in Beck’s documentary are situated on a continuum of “job creators” with managers of capital-intensive, multinational corporation with thousands of employees.

The concept of “job creator” and its association with the rich, however, poses a set of core problems for Beck and Fox News not only because it is in tension with the “smallness” and populist positionality of the small business owner, but also because having the ability to give or deny job positions is not so obviously productive work. In its long history, producerist discourse has associated social value with laboriousness. The term, “the working-class,” is etymologically linked to this moral category, and its nineteenth-century predecessor, “the producing class” (Williams, 1985).¹¹⁹ Contrasting colonial American enterprise to aristocratic idleness in Britain, Benjamin Franklin once called the U.S. the “land of labor” and for hundreds of years the “hard worker” has been considered the ideal civic subject. In contrast, wealth by birth has been looked down

¹¹⁹ In his book *Key Words* (1985), Williams writes, “It was by the producerist definition, by its “transfer from the sense of useful or productive that the working classes were first named” (p. 64).

upon. Echoing these cultural values, Fox News programs constantly reiterate that the wealth of the worthy rich is the product of individual effort, not natal class or idle crony capitalism.

In a debate with congressman Weiner, Hannity said, "I can't think of one person that I knew in my life that has money that grew up with money. Most of the people that I know that became wealthy worked really, really hard." In another episode, his guest Lou Holtz, a famous former college football coach, tells Hannity that by raising taxes, "we're trying to punish...people that are most successful. Like, if you're successful, man, you must have done it illegally rather than with hard work and things like it" (4/13/2010). As is evident in Holtz's comments, in Fox News's top rated shows the term "the successful" is regularly used to describe the worthy rich. Unlike the term "rich," the term "successful" treats affluence or market dominance as earned and merited.

The same rhetoric is asserted in an episode of *The O'Reilly Factor* as well. In an episode where guest professor Lamont Hill argues that Democrats "want to reward hard work" by providing better healthcare, education, and housing to the ninety-five percent of Americans "who go to work everyday," O'Reilly responds, "Rewarding hard work is when you succeed" (3/10/2009). The market determines the value of producers. When translated into moral terms, the privileged position of most elites is redefined as a product of the labor-value of their work. In Fox News's social imaginary, all actors whose worth is defined by the market share a solidarity as "workers" and "producers." In this way, Fox News commentators emphatically argue that the business class and the wealthy are workers too. Often, they are framed as the hardest workers or, to use a

term from conservative intellectual and novelist Ayn Rand, as the *super-producers*.¹²⁰

On Fox News, they are not class enemies of the working class, but rather heroic versions of working people—the equivalent of Michael Jordan to amateur athletes.

Fox News’s constant emphasis on the hard working personalities of “job creators” aligns them with the working class by defining them against unearned privilege and the idle. But businessmen do not fit the labor theory of value. So, how can “job creation” and mere business ownership be said to create value? Beck and Fox News’s entrepreneurial brand of producerism must construct the job creator’s economic activity as useful, value-creating labor. So what kind of labor do job creators do in the world of Fox News?

“Job creators” mainly amass capital, organize personnel, and live by the rules of the market. This is illustrated in an episode of *Glenn Beck*, where Beck compares the U.S. federal government to “one company” which he sarcastically names “evil capitalism, Inc.” In Beck’s depiction, this company does not live by the market, and cannot govern in the face of its collapse. He suggests that the key to getting the “American engine” to “start up” is to put to work the skills and insight of a CEO, which he equates with “common sense.” Beck explains:

this one company, “evil capitalism Inc.” has these four [product] divisions. This one is losing, this one is losing, this one losing, but who looks like pie [i.e. the profitable product line]?....This one isn’t taking any money from the parent company. This one is having dollars poured into it....This one is not...Would you consider forcing this division to spend more money to become like these divisions? I don’t think so. What you do as a good CEO is you’d see these divisions and say, you suck. Do what this division

¹²⁰ The term “super-producers” is taken from Ayn Rand’s novel *Atlas Shrugged*, a novel that promotes laissez-faire principles and political economic structures. However, unlike entrepreneurial producerism, Ayn Rand’s super-producerism, as evident by the name, has an elitist and social Darwinist quality and lacks the egalitarian, small business populism of entrepreneurial producerism. In short, Randian producerism espouses a naked form of plutocratic thinking, while entrepreneurial producerism appeals to the “little guy.”

is doing. Wouldn't you? You certainly wouldn't penalize this division. You try to get everybody to emulate that through the rest of the company. As a CEO, if you had one division consistently outperforming others, you wouldn't punish it. But that's exactly what America's CEO [president Obama] is now doing. (8/11/2010)

The essential skill that Beck identifies with the CEO is an ability to recognize productivity and market performance of workers and products, and a willingness to distribute financial resources and organizational support accordingly. In Fox News programming, the term CEO stands for effective leadership, and the phrase, "running a business," stands for good governance. In an interview segment of *Hannity*, his guest, former vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin questions the leadership ability of president Obama and his administration by saying, "I don't know when they have run a business. I don't know when they have been a CEO of anything where they've had to look out for the bottom line and they've had to make payroll and live within their own means with a budget"(4/10/2010).¹²¹ On one level, Palin represents the CEO as embodying fiscal discipline and responsibility in contrast to "reckless," misuse of money that, Palin and other pundits argue, is exemplified by president Obama's policies for handling the Recession. Wise money management is equated with what is done in a frugal families —ones that understand how to budget and "tighten their belts" in hard times— or by small business owners who, like CEOs, are accountable to market forces and understand the workings of the economy. In an episode of *Glenn Beck*, guest Mark

¹²¹ In the programming of Fox News's top shows, the management skill of the CEO and the legitimacy of their leadership position is consistently asserted and juxtaposed with the incompetence of government officials and regulators and the illegitimacy of their position of power. For example, in an episode of Glenn Beck, guest John Tamny argues, "Regulators are never equal with the very the people they want to regulate. If they had this kind of skills, they certainly wouldn't work for the federal government." Beck responds, "Exactly" (6/29/2009). In another episode of *Glenn Beck*, guest Michelle Malkin echoes a similar theme about government incompetence and the handling of the Recession stating, "only in Washington do you put an arsonist in charge of putting out the fire" (1/21/2009).

Sanford, the Republican Governor of South Carolina, spoke against some polls that showed that the majority of citizens in Florida supported taking federal stimulus money for infrastructure projects. He said, “there is a silent majority out there who doesn’t fit at all with those polls...who overwhelmingly are hard working small businesspeople who know what it’s like to meet the bottom line, who had to actually make adjustments in their small businesses, who’ve actually had to make real world sacrifices” (6/8/2009).

In Fox News programming, an equation is regularly made between big and small businessmen, suggesting that all private sector actors have—as evidenced by their superior fiscal self-discipline and managerial aptitude—a greater sense of economic realism than those working in the public sector or those receiving public aid. When depicting the business world, Fox News programs often use a discourse of what could be called “market empiricism,” that is, a notion that the market is an institution that most accurately reflects the conditions of empirical reality or to use the language of Governor Sanford, the “real world.” In turn, the public sector is represented as sphere of distorted reality that has been created by those who want to selfishly and irresponsibly insulate themselves and others from the social and moral obligation of work. The moral imperative is, in Fox News programming especially, to submit to market competition.

One sees the discourse of market empiricism in an episode of *The O’Reilly Factor*, in which O’Reilly explains the nature of the economy. In this clip, it is notable how O’Reilly seeks to legitimate his economic analysis by aligning it with the views of not only a famous, former CEO (Jack Welch of General Electric), but even Wall Street traders who also live and die by the market. O’Reilly states, “Welch is echoing what Wall Street believes that all this social engineering Barack Obama is promoting has little to do with getting the economy on track. Until the president understands that Wall Street is not

buying into his western European vision for America, the economy will remain at risk. Ideology and capitalism are not a good mix. Free markets are tough places where the strong survive and the weak go under. Big government cannot dictate a vibrant marketplace” (3/10/2009). Note how the business world is represented as a pragmatic, and even naturalistic sphere of action.¹²² When O’Reilly comments about “ideology and capitalism” not mixing, he treats government figures (e.g. president Obama) as ideologically-driven proponents of social engineering who only have “political knowledge” (Said, 1979). Unlike public-sector workers and politicians, business figures exercise “pure knowledge”—utilitarian intelligence, and practical skills.¹²³

In another episode of *The O’Reilly Factor*, where O’Reilly interviews former vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin, the value of producers is again constructed against the public-sector’s supposedly false standards of merit. In this interview, O’Reilly asks

¹²² O’Reilly’s description of the market as a “tough place, where the strong survive and weak go under” repeats a common naturalist conception of the private sector that is found throughout the Recession coverage and across all three top programs. For example, in a *Glenn Beck* episode, one pundit blames “irresponsible” homeowners and borrowers for the mortgage meltdown and criticizes efforts by the government to mitigate foreclosures using a similar naturalist understanding of the economy. He states, “It’s a reverse Darwinism. It’s a survival of the unfittest. The government rewards bad behavior and punishes good behavior” (12/28/2009). As evident in the language and phrases in these quotes, on Fox News one finds clear allusions to social Darwinist thinking. However, Fox News’s naturalist representation of the market takes other forms that rely on meteorological or ecological metaphors.

In an episode of *Glenn Beck* that aired February 18, 2009, the day after the American Recovery Act was passed, Beck criticizes government-based stimulative measures and particularly the government bailouts of the banks and the auto industry telling the audience that these measures will only prolong the inevitable death of these industries. To make his own prescription on how to best handle the crisis, Beck compares the market failure of 2008 to a natural disaster. He says, “I think we need to handle this financial crisis like it’s a forest fire....what’s already on fire has to burn to the ground in a controlled manner, letting the greedy, letting the corrupt and the downright stupid fail. It will replenish the soil of capitalism, and give us the chance to rebuild the right way. But, it seems to me we’re headed down the road to socialism.”

¹²³ In his analysis of the Fox News’s website Fred Vultee applies Edward Said’s concepts of “pure knowledge” and “political knowledge.” However, he maintains that the “purity” of the knowledge Fox News presents is established by the “veil of expertise,” meaning the deployment of formal, credentialed knowledge (Vultee, 2009). In contrast, I am arguing that it is established by Fox News populist, producerist mode of address and construction of market empiricism.

Palin to respond to critics that question her intelligence and capability and poses the question, “Do you believe that you are smart enough, incisive enough, intellectual enough to handle the most powerful job in the world?” Palin responds, “I believe that I am because I have common sense. And I have, I believe, the values that are reflective of so many other American values. And I believe that what Americans are seeking is not the elitism, the kind of a spinelessness that perhaps is made up for with some kind of elite Ivy League education and a fat resume that's based on anything but hard work and private sector, free enterprise principles”(11/20/2009).¹²⁴ To Palin, educational credentials are not as good a measure of worth as living by “private-sector, free enterprise principles” and “hard work.” So, producers are defined not only against government workers, but educational elites who also do not measure worth in market terms. Because the market is constructed as the fundamental apparatus for measuring merit, educational credentials—a standard of worth assumed to be most valued in the public-sector—are viewed as inflated (e.g. “fat resume”) or altogether illusory indicators of capability, work ethic, and intelligence.

In these ways, Fox News programs work to naturalize the association between utilitarian intelligence, the practical world, and the free market, emphasizing social affinities between the business class and the working-class.¹²⁵ From this position, Fox News is able to present reasons to politically oppose Obama’s stimulus spending and to

¹²⁴ In the last chapter, I demonstrated how anti-credentialist discourse helps align the conservative political identity with a working-class aesthetic disposition, here one sees how it is used to align the business class with working-class utilitarianism thus articulating and rationalizing Fox News’s taste-based discourse of cultural populism with its political economic discourse of entrepreneurial producerism.

¹²⁵ Michelle Lamont (2000) demonstrates how white American workers tend to respect and accept authority when it is perceived to be based on true “competence,” which is, for workers as well as for professional-managers, primarily measured by one’s demonstration of “know-how” and functional skills (p. 107).

support greater privatization of the public sector. The result of privatization is portrayed not as a loss of services or opportunity for workers but rather as a way to expand the realm that most recognizes their work ethic, brand of intelligence, and skill-set.

Fox News also uses the terms “socialism” and “capitalism” during its Recession coverage to describe the divide between producers and parasites. The constant invocation of these terms convey to the Left the extreme nature of the modern Right, the chaos of the times, or of the alarmist, bombastic style of Fox News programming. More importantly, they semantically act as short hand for the network’s more elaborate construction of their schema of class, and celebration of the market. The term, capitalism, and its corollary, the private sector, signify in Fox News programs the traditional moral world and meritocratic strategies of producerism: hard work, personal discipline, economic reckoning, and practical know-how. These construct capitalism as consistent with and identifiable within working-class morality and culture. While liberal critics were smugly pointing out that Fox News pundits’ misused the word socialism, Fox News pundits were making this term and its corollary, the public-sector, tools for shaping a producerist ethic with its own special conservative meanings.¹²⁶ Socialism became a useful way for Fox News programs to signify the opposite of producerism, implying political favoritism, ideological conformity, and elite educational credentialism, all the things the liberal elite supposedly use to avoid the true test of the market. In a February 10, 2009 episode of Glenn Beck, guest Arthur Laffer, a key intellectual figure in the development supply-side economics (e.g. “the Laffer Curve”), tells Glenn Beck that in a socialist society, “you don’t get the work effort,” because he maintains, socialism

¹²⁶ As opposed to a specific political economic system, Fox pundits often used the term socialism to describe, using O’Reilly’s words, “a mindset” (1/5/2009).

“disassociate[s] effort from reward.” In Fox News’s representational universe, socialism, as Palin, Laffer and other Fox News pundits suggests, stands for an immoral strategy of personal gain based on social maneuvering and institutional favoritism rather than *real* labor and merit.

The Pitfalls of Valorizing Managerial Skill through the Producer Tradition

In framing the accumulation of capital and the organization of other peoples’ labor as itself productive, Fox News’s appropriation of the producerist tradition marks a fundamental break from the way the political movements of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth-century utilized the labor theory of value and defined the productive class. For example, the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian producerism of the nineteenth-century defined the producers as artisans and farmers and asserted a laissez-faire political economic ideology. Early twentieth-century Progressives and the New Deal coalition highlighted the productiveness of the industrial-proletariat and supported a more interventionist state. For all their differences, previous iterations of the producerist tradition shared the fundamental premise that value was created by direct labor, that is, by the people closest to the point of production. It becomes especially clear if one contrasts terms like “job doers” or “product creators” with the term “job creators,” that the job creators are institutionally and socially a step *above* and a step removed from the laborers that are *directly* involved in the production of a product or service. While the entrepreneurial producerism on Fox News attempts to represent managerial activity as exemplary of utilitarian intelligence and skills, the types of utilitarian skills that have been most lauded by the working-class political movements of the past are absent: the skills that physically and directly lead to the making of stuff. For this reason, progressive

reformer and fierce ideologue Frederick Howe uses the adjective “primary” when he discussed the producers writing in 1925, “the place for the liberal was in labor’s ranks...My political enthusiasm was now for a party of ‘primary’ producers” (Fraser, 1989, p. 55). To give value to managerial activity in their rhetoric, image and iconography, Fox News presents entrepreneurial producers as small business owners who exemplify the small producer artisan or farmer of Jeffersonian America, who stands as both owner and entrepreneur, manual laborer and skilled craftsperson.

In Beck’s documentary in the “You Are not Alone” episode, the representation of the entrepreneurial producers does not show individuals in business suits and in office buildings. Rather, like Jefferson’s ideal republic of small producers, each small business owner is either presented as working with their hands (e.g. a man washing the car, the couple handling produce) or is implied to be someone who does (e.g. bakery owner). However, if one returns to Beck’s depiction of what a CEO does in the episode where he uses the analogy of the “evil capitalism” company, the job creator is imagined to be someone who is making decisions about how to organize divisions of a massive corporation and which product lines to financially prioritize, things truly small business owners are unlikely to ever have to consider. But more importantly, in this episode the labor-skill that is emphasized by Beck is the ability to evaluate and stand in judgment of other people’s labor and tell them whether or not, to use Beck’s words, they “suck.” By constantly referencing and celebrating managerial skills and duties, there is a danger that Fox News programs will unintentionally remind the viewer of managerial supervision and experiences of subjugation in the workplace. By potentially inciting the audience’s resentment toward managers, Fox News’s entrepreneurial brand of producerism could undermine the very thing that gives it its resonance, which is its utopian kernel, its vision

of a post-industrial economy of small producers. The power and appeal of this vision, it cannot be stressed enough, is not exclusive to the conservative base as evidenced by the growing popularity of “buy local” campaigns and small business farming and artisan food production amongst culturally liberal communities.¹²⁷

To construct the productiveness of the business class and the wealthy and to displace working-class feelings of hostility toward them, Fox News programs oscillate between two depictions of the job creators: one as on-the-floor, small business owner/craftsmen and the other as big business, corporate managers. Drawing on the concepts of literary theorist Roland Barthes, one can explain this oscillation as a representational technique that Fox News programs use to produce the “cultural myth” of the job creators (Barthes, 1972). As exemplified in the episodes that have been covered, this technique entails a semiotic process whereby the second-order signifieds of the CEO class become attached to and feed off of first-order signifieds that are drawn from producerism’s pre-industrial, nineteenth-century vision of work, market competition, and distributional justice. The consequence of Fox News’s deployment of this technique is that the first-order signifieds of the producer tradition and thus the tradition itself is “transformed” by and into conservative free market discourse. The greater political consequence of this is that the history of the producer tradition—particularly the historical moments when producerist discourse articulated leftist moral-economic values—is

¹²⁷ As many great historical studies on American populism and producer republicanism have shown, one of the strongest impetuses for artisan producer movements in the United States in the nineteenth-century was the threatening prospect that the industrial, wage-system dominating the English economy would take root in America. For American artisans and farmers, one of the fundamental moral and political problems of British style industrialism and labor relations was that it robbed the artisan producer of his economic independence—a core tenet of American republicanism—by making him subject to the wage system and managerial judgment. Under an industrial-managerial structure, the worker’s individual labor was no longer measured and valued by the meritorious market rather it was judged by other men. See Palmer, 1980, chapter one; Wilentz, 1986; Pollack, 1966; Noble, 1985; Foner, 1970; Goodwyn, 1978; Montgomery, 1981).

obscured and as a result the tradition becomes viewed, in the present moment, by both the left and the right as naturally associated with conservative populism.

Chapter Three Conclusion

In the midst of one of the deepest economic downturns in recent history, rather than avoiding the issue of socioeconomic class as one might assume an ideologically conservative news network would, Fox News's top-rated shows made economic class hierarchy one of the central themes of its Recession coverage. However, it did so by carefully reconfiguring the rhetoric of economic class in a specific and limited way. In their coverage of the Recession, Fox News's top-rated programs emphasized the existence of exploitative and unjust economic relations. However, these relations are almost always presented as the product of corrupt behavior in the political system and biased government intervention. In this way, Fox News programs are able to engage and draw attention socioeconomic inequalities so nakedly exposed by the financial meltdown and at the same time deny the market's role in producing them. Furthermore, rather than being the cause of exploitative class relations, the market is presented as a liberatory, subversive force that counteracts the political-education-based class system. This does not mean that Fox News programs present the private sector as a classless domain rather the private economy is presented as a "naturally classed" social space where, to quote O'Reilly, "the strong survive and weak go under."¹²⁸

Equally important to discourses that describe material class differences and

¹²⁸ In his history of class-based political rhetoric titled *The Conundrum of Class* (1995), David Burke argues that this rhetorical pattern has, since the nation's founding, been central to debates concerning class. He writes, "The societal contrasts made by many Americans from the 1780s through the 1880s—and beyond—were between "artificial" schemes of classification and "natural" ones.....or between "republican" and "anti-republican" usages of 'class' (pp. x-xi).

social scientific knowledge that explains what creates and causes class inequality, moral discourses of class serve to tell us why one should care about class in the first place and, when in the service of a political-ideological project, they tell one which ones to be concerned with and which ones to ignore or accept as natural and fair.¹²⁹ In the Recession era, when the talk of class hierarchy and distribution started to saturate the news media, Fox News's top-rated programs placed great effort in tapping into and reconfiguring the value-system of the producer republican tradition. In political and ideological terms, this is wise considering the profound role this tradition has played and continues to play in shaping our moral understanding of wealth, work and social merit.

¹²⁹ Andrew Sayer makes a similar point in his book *The Moral Significance of Class* (2005, p. 7).

Chapter Four: Creating the Conservative Legacy of the Great Depression: Racializing the Stimulus Act through the Collective Memory of the Great Depression

The forgotten man used to be the guy who was just the poor McDonald's worker. The forgotten man is not the McDonald's worker now. The forgotten man is the one who's carrying the bill. The McDonald's worker gets the house. The bank gets the money. The forgotten man is the one they keep taking the money from, the man in the middle.

—Glenn Beck

What is most surprising and bold about Fox News's "forgotten man" narrative is how it claims to represent the economically downtrodden and how it uses the memory of the Great Depression to do so. The history of the Depression, the theme of economic hardship, and the forgotten man trope are unlikely ideological tools for Fox News to utilize in its framing of the stimulus debate, seeing that they are things usually associated with leftist politics. Though coined by a conservative intellectual in the late-nineteenth-century, the term the "forgotten man" was popularized by Franklin Roosevelt in a 1932 campaign speech and served to identify the Democratic Party with the poor, an association that has held to this day. Roosevelt used the concept of the forgotten man to refer to, to use his words, "those at the bottom of the economic pyramid," a political constituency one tends not to associate with the pro-business-class, trickle-down politics of the right. Paralleling the argument Roosevelt makes in his forgotten man speech

about the need for greater government intervention in the economy and stronger check on corporate power, the history of the Great Depression itself has been most often invoked by liberals as a case exemplifying the efficacy and righteousness of social welfare, regulation, and Keynesian countercyclical spending measures, the very things Fox News programs oppose. Considering these political and ideological associations, how could Fox News programs effectively use the forgotten man trope and the history of the Depression to assert their anti-stimulus story about government theft?

Using the history of the Great Depression as a significant part of Fox News's strategy in early 2009 carried inherent risks. Invoking the Depression, especially during a time of severe and widespread economic pain, draws even greater attention to the themes of poverty and wealth inequality, topics that have traditionally supported left-liberal arguments for government intervention and compromised conservative arguments for laissez-faire capitalism. In addition to foregrounding the theme of poverty, this historical referent is popularly associated with Franklin Roosevelt, the most venerated Democratic president, and the New Deal and New Deal coalition, the greatest policy and electoral victory for the Democratic Party. Hoping to take advantage of the favorable associations built into the popular memory of the Great Depression, Barack Obama as much if not more than any other major political figure repeatedly made references to the Great Depression in his speeches and interviews from the beginning of the crisis. For example, in his November 4, 2008 victory speech, president Obama asserted that the Depression was "conquered with a New Deal, new jobs and a sense of common

purpose. Yes we can.”¹³⁰ In the wake of Obama’s electoral victory a slew of stories and editorials appeared in the mainstream press that drew parallels between FDR and Obama’s respective political ascendancies and speculated on the prospect of Obama and Democrats passing a policy program as bold in scale and degree as Roosevelt’s New Deal. One issue of *Time Magazine* published the day after Obama won the 2008 presidential election played with the iconic black and white photo of Roosevelt with a cigarette in his mouth by replacing FDR’s face with a colored, modern photo of Obama’s face. The caption reads: “The New New Deal.”

As Recession worsened in early 2009, Barack Obama again turned to the Great Depression as way to contextualize the crisis for the American public. On February 7, 2009, the Labor Department released numbers that showed January to be the greatest one-month job loss in 34 years, following four consecutive months of job loss. That day, in a weekly address Obama called the Recession “our greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression” and this line, according to a Pew study, would become the third most frequently quoted lines in the national media during 2009.¹³¹ While a significant portion of commentators were already referring to the late-2000s Recession as the ‘Great Recession’ in the fall of 2008, this moniker was solidified in the popular lexicon as its usage spiked in the national press from January to March of 2009 (Rampell, 2009). As has been the case with the previous recessions in the last several decades, the very name of the late-2000s “Great” Recession had been semantically seared to the history of the 1930s.

¹³⁰ Obama, B. (2008, November 5). Obama's Victory Speech [transcript]. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/04/us/politics/04text-obama.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹³¹ This study also noted that that the Depression comparison has been one of the most persistent, widespread media themes of Recession coverage overall having various iterations (Pew Research Center, 2009).

Turning to long held identifications that were forged in the political struggles of the Depression era, many critics and observers assumed that the left had a secure monopoly over the memory of the Depression and, by extension, the theme of economic hardship and, therefore, predicted that the financial misery wrought by the 2008 collapse would create an advantageous political environment for the progressive movement. Indeed, at the level of electoral politics, Barack Obama's historic grassroots presidential campaign and victory is an indication that, at least at the earliest stages of the crisis, this in fact happened. However, once Obama took office and the stimulus bill started to be developed and pushed through congress, Fox News and the Republican Party increasingly sought to claim the history of the Great Depression as a history that reinforces *conservative* economic principles and opposed to one that calls them into question.

In this chapter, I show how Fox News programs attempt to reverse the political sensibility of the Great Depression from a leftist to a conservative orientation by presenting modern conservatives as the rightful heirs of the Depression generation's legacy and by framing the political ascendancy of Barack Obama and the Stimulus Act as the sign of a worrisome generational shift and cultural turn away from traditional values. A key component of Fox News's retelling of the Great Depression is how the network's top programs engaged the popular memory of the historical event by utilizing iconic film footage and photographs from the Depression era. In foregrounding poverty, the Depression era iconography conveys the leftist politics of 1930s and, therefore, poses a problem for Fox News's pro-business, trickle down politics. However, this iconography also predominantly features white, male workers and because of this Fox News programs were better able to draw cultural bonds between the viewer and the

Depression generation on the basis of shared whiteness, producer ethic and masculine conception of labor. In addition, Fox News programs highlighted minorities, young people and women in its representation of the Obama generation in order draw starker contrasts between the FDR generation and present day Democrats. While Fox News programs obscured the Depression generation's reliance on New Deal programs and their political leftism, they framed the contemporary recipients of stimulus aid as welfare dependents who, in their supposed lack of work ethic and moral integrity, are fundamentally different from the "Greatest Generation."

Tapping the Collective Memory of Great Depression

One of the major obstacles Fox News's top programs faced in their attempts to use the Great Depression as an ideological tool for framing the contemporary downturn is that the Depression—one of the most documented, referenced and written about events in American history—carries eighty years of embedded meanings and established interpretations. Considering the Depression's immense ideological baggage, Fox News's attempt to invoke the memory of the Depression to demonstrate the superior benefit of free market solutions and the folly of New Deal-like policies poses an even greater challenge. Not only must Fox News contend with nearly a century's worth of professional historical scholarship on the Depression, they must also contend with the way the Great Depression has been widely remembered. A popular understanding of the Depression is that it was caused by greed, the excesses of unregulated capitalism and the polarization of wealth. In turn, in the popular historical view president Roosevelt stands as the era's central hero, valorized for standing up to Wall Street and for his bold, *affirmative* use of government to address the crisis and ease

the economic misery of millions of Americans. While Fox News hosts and commentators repeatedly refer to this popular interpretation as a “myth” or “misreading of history,” they acknowledge its popular, dominant status. In a *Hannity* segment on the Depression, guest Mike Huckabee admits this much telling Hannity, “I grew up a child of the south where FDR was heralded as one of the great heroes. People thought of him as getting us out of the Depression. I’ve often said that the three great heroes of the Deep South were Jesus, Elvis, and FDR. Not necessarily in that order” (2/20/2009).

One way Fox News’s top programs dealt with this problem was by having professional historians and other “official” voices empirically discredit and de-mythologize the popular account. Yet, when an event attains the degree of centrality that Depression has in the collective memory of the nation, the subject of its history is always potentially more than an academic debate or an empirical question. Its invocation becomes an occasion for speaking to and re-presenting the national community and its values. For Fox News’s top programs to take advantage of the broader ideological uses of a historical event so central to American culture, they could not merely rely on expert sources of history and intellectual modes of argumentation to make their argument against the New Deal, the proxy argument for their anti-stimulus position. In the following section, I demonstrate how Fox News’s programs accept and employ the dominant symbols of the Depression (i.e. the popular ways in which it has been remembered) as a way to establish a connection with the collective memory of the event and to subsequently manage its meaning in light of the contemporary political environment and the crisis.

In his book *Watergate in American Memory* (1992), Michael Schudson argues that any group seeking to reshape the collective memory of a given event by replacing

the preexisting, dominant interpretations that comprise it with a new, more ideologically suitable one must first enter into a conversation with these established interpretations. In terms of the programming Fox News devoted to the Depression, this means that rather than offering the audience a novel intellectual argument about the Depression and expecting them to accept it by sheer expert-academic fiat, Fox News programs met the audience halfway by first recognizing the knowledge they are assumed to already have about the event. But exactly how did Fox News programs call upon the viewer's popular knowledge and tap into the collective memory of the Depression?

Schudson argues that it is wrong to view the collective memory of a nation as an aggregate product of millions of individual memories that coalesce like rain drops into a pool, because this conceptualization leads one, Schudson asserts, to view it as something that develops in a seemingly organic way without systematic direction or intention. Instead, he stresses how collective memory is produced by and located in specific institutions, and is handed down from generation to generation through a select set of symbols and through "particular cultural forms and transmitted in particular cultural vehicles" (p. 5). These symbols (e.g. an iconic photo, a memorable phrase, a historic figure), cultural forms (e.g. a political speech, a talk show, a photographic essay) and cultural vehicles (e.g. radio, television, public education) are not only the things through which one encounters a shared sense of our nation's past, they are the things that give the collective memory of an event a degree of tactility, that is, a way to handle and shape it for specific interests and purposes.

When the Great Depression is mentioned, often the first thing that comes to mind are old black and white photos and film footage of unemployment lines, soup kitchens and the Dust Bowl. The Depression isn't simply a historical referent that recalls a

moment of great national hardship; it recalls a visual-centric memory of national hardship. The visual nature of our collective memory of the Depression makes sense in light of the fact that documentary film was more or less born during the 1930s. Before the Depression, few social reformers recognized the political potential of images and film. However, it was during the Depression that documentary became the leading form of political critique amongst radicals, liberals and, even the Federal government (i.e. the Roosevelt administration) (Stott, 1973; Rabinowitz, 1994). In addition, by the 1930s the dawn of the so-called “Golden Age” of Hollywood had begun and commercial cinema had arrived as a major institution of public opinion and mass communication. Political, government, and commercial documentaries in the form of widely consumed newsreels saturated 1930s culture with visual imagery making the Depression more visualized than any historical event before it.

As a way to familiarize viewers with Fox News’s more esoteric free market interpretation of the Depression’s history, the network’s top programs consistently interspersed visual representations of the Depression with their arguments against the New Deal. Often iconic images from the era were displayed before or at the same time hosts and guests discuss more abstract and less familiar subject matter concerning particular New Deal policies, economic statistics and theories. In an episode of *Hannity*, one sees this in a short documentary that the program aired on the history of the Depression. As Hannity recites, “Public Works Administration [of the New Deal]...spent over six billion dollars without significantly reducing unemployment,” the viewer is shown 1930s film footage and still images of men waiting in an unemployment lines, a visual scene that stands as one the most enduring images of the Depression (2/20/2009) (see image 3.1 left side). A similar scene is displayed on an episode of *Glenn Beck* where a

video window of Depression era footage played while Beck's guest, a conservative historian, discusses specific policies of the National Recovery Administration (see image 3.1 right side).



Image 3.1: Hannity and Glenn Beck Depression era footage

Using the dominant symbols and icons of the Depression effectively works to enhance the viewer's identification with Fox News's presentation and rereading of the historical event.

Their use, however, carries risks for Fox News's free market ideology and anti-Obama, anti-stimulus political agenda. Expressed through aged media technologies and an old-fashioned aesthetic, these icons not only give the viewer a feel and texture of 1930s culture, but more tacitly carry a sense of the radical leftist politics of the Depression era. The shift of national culture to the left in the 1930s has had enduring effects, shaping American public discourse long after the Depression generation. This cultural transformation continues to inform, though to a far lesser extent, the language and symbols of today's political and cultural environment (Denning, 1998; Lipsitz, 1994, 2001). This shift didn't automatically arise as a result of the economic crisis.¹³² It was

¹³² Historian Alice O'Connor (2007) stresses that the Keynesian consensus that emerged out of

partly driven by the rapid growth and mobilization of the Popular Front, a powerful left-wing social movement and political coalition, which included, as its popular base, thousands of industrial, unionized workers from the Congress for Industrial Organization (CIO), intellectuals and radical political activists from the Communist Party of America, and more establishmentarian political groups and figures associated with the Democratic Party, the New Deal coalition and the Roosevelt administration (Denning, 1998; Montgomery, 1994; Zieger, 1995; Kimeldorf, 1988; Cohen, 2008; Davis, 1986, chapter two; Fraser, 1989; Markowitz, 1973). This political transformation was equally driven by forces outside of the arenas of electoral politics, labor relations, and government policy. Expressed in 1930s mass commercial culture, leftist politics were advanced knowingly and unknowingly by entertainment industries and government-sponsored cultural institutions.

Recognizing the power of visual imagery, the Roosevelt administration established an agency called the Farm Securities Administration (FSA) which subsidized a group of photographers and filmmakers to produce works that highlight the widespread conditions of poverty across the country (especially in rural areas) in order to persuade congress to support New Deal policies. The FSA's collection of photographic and documentary works stands one of the most commonly referenced sources for depicting the Depression era. In one *Glenn Beck* episode, the program displays the FSA's most famous photograph, arguably the most iconic photographic of the Depression, Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother." In their own historical context, the political documentary style

the Depression era did not come about merely because of the crisis but rather was the product of, she writes, "intellectual entrepreneurship, and internal politicking within key agencies of economic policy advice" (p. 87). For a more comprehensive history on the rise of the Keynesian intellectual project see Michael Bernstein's *A Perilous Progress: Economists and Public Purpose in Twentieth-Century America* (2001).

of Lange and other FSA artists such as Pare Lorentz greatly influenced how mass commercial producers such as popular magazines and newsreels depicted the Depression. However, the FSA's productions and emulations of them in the commercial culture of the time were not explicitly political. As Paula Rabinowitz argues in her book *They Must Be Represented* (1994), the visual media of the Depression era emerged, she writes, "out of large corporate or governmental bureaucracies and their makers were staunch liberals," that is, they were moderates, not radical leftists or communists. Yet, she maintains that because the Popular Front mobilized at such a crucial juncture of the Depression, the movement's left-wing critique of capitalism steered the terms of the national political conversation to such a degree that, she asserts, "even the most commercial and/or official representations of culture engaged with issues foregrounded by radicals" (p. 77).

In the various episodes and segments devoted to the Depression that aired in 2009, Fox News's top-rated shows regularly included Depression era photographs and film footage of the most recognizable scenes of the Depression: the unemployment lines, soup kitchens, barren rural landscapes, migrant laborers, and toiling workers. Because these documentary images still provide some of the most resonant symbols of economic hardship that exist in American popular culture, Fox News programs turns to this iconography to try to make sense of the audience's experience of the present economic crisis. As was the case with their use and circulation in the 1930s, the familiar repertoire of visual images used by Fox News programs do not directly advocate any particular left-liberal policy or political platform. Yet, by the very things these images all tend to focus on, by the kinds of people and social circumstances they call attention to, they convey—as subtext—the Popular Front's political commitments, their vision of, to use historian

Michael Denning's words, a "new moral economy" that sees wage workers as the heart of the nation and places the poor at the center of public concern.

Depression era historian Robert McElvaine argues that one of the lasting legacies of the Depression was that it "led many in the middle class to identify their interests and values with those of the poor" and to misidentify with the laissez-faire values of possessive individualism that prevailed during "The Roaring Twenties" (p. xiv). In terms of political history, McElvaine adds that another major consequence of the Depression is that from the 1930s onward the Democratic Party identified itself with the "downtrodden," those the economic system works against, leaves out, or "forgets."

However, these visual representations of the Depression hardship have been, like the New Deal's policy approach to the economic hardship of the Depression itself, racially and gender selective. The Depression era image of economic pain that has been foregrounded and reproduced across the decades has mostly been the pain of white, male workers. Though the iconography of the Depression raises the theme of economic hardship and this has the potential to resurrect the leftist politics of the 1930s, these selective view of hardship makes usable the counter-subversive elements of 1930s leftist politics, namely, how the New Deal reinforced patriarchal ideologies and practices and buttressed as opposed to challenging the "white republic" of nineteenth-century politics (Saxton, 1990, Lipsitz, 1998, Roediger 1991). In the next section, I will demonstrate how Fox News programming is able to disarticulate the leftist politics of the Depression era and politically reposition the history of the Depression by accentuating social and cultural bonds between the Fox News viewer and the Depression generation on the basis of their shared work ethic, whiteness and masculine image of productive labor.

Framing past and present crises in this way has the effect of expressing Depression hardship as exclusively white hardship. The current economic hardship must therefore also be white to be read as worthy of political recognition and/or action. The racially exclusive quality of the Depression's memory and iconography was not created by Fox News but rather by the New Deal policy project and political coalition itself. However, as I'll demonstrate in the next section, Fox News programs took advantage of this preexisting racial association to preclude potential connections between the class-based experiences of racial minorities in the current crisis and the Great Depression generation. This disconnected and exclusively white claim to Depression hardship is especially contradictory considering the fact African American and Hispanic communities have faced unemployment and foreclosure rates in the late-2000s Recession that are more comparable to the Depression era rates than those currently faced by their white contemporaries.¹³³

By presenting government aid and interventionist policies as exclusively for people of color and those who do not work, Fox News programs offered the viewer a racial rationale for overlooking their own reliance on these policies as well as the Greatest Generation's reliance on them in the form of the New Deal. However, using whiteness and anti-welfare discourses to disassociate the Depression generation with New Deal policies and FDR is only effective to a certain degree and at a point threatens to alienate its audience by suggesting that they are or their family had been welfare dependents too. The New Deal and FDR are inescapable points of reference in the collective memory of the Depression and many of Fox News's audience members may

¹³³ According to the 2011 U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics report, in mid-2010 the unemployment rate was 15.8% for U.S. blacks and 12.4% for Hispanics, compared to 8.8. for white people. Young works have also endured far higher rates of unemployment than their older counterparts.

still venerate FDR as Fox News pundits acknowledge. The audience, their parents, or grandparents may have benefited from New Deal policies, and even some Fox News pundits have admitted this about their own parents during segments examining the New Deal.¹³⁴ For this reason, Fox News's analysis of Depression era economic policies utilized a proportionally different representational strategy to discredit New Deal government intervention than it used to critique the stimulus bill. The critique of the New Deal posed by Fox News pundits conspicuously lacked the same quality of moral condemnation as the stimulus bill and, in fear of offending the family histories of its audience, Fox News programs seldom if ever framed New Deal policies as welfare handouts. The historical debate over the New Deal is consistently oriented toward the *technical* question of the New Deal's efficacy to repair the national economy in 1930s and less toward a question about the moral worth of those who benefited from New Deal policies. By attacking the New Deal policies on more *empirical* historical grounds and less on moral grounds, Fox News was able to discredit the principle of government intervention underlying the New Deal without calling into the question the Depression generation's work ethic, self-reliance and manhood.

¹³⁴ In a December 8, 2008 episode of *Hannity* (then called *Hannity & Colmes*), recurring guest Dick Morris mentioned how the New Deal benefited his family because the Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided his mother with a job teaching English. It is notable that this is the same person who, in an episode of *The O'Reilly Factor* cited above, argued that Obama's Stimulus Bill was a "Trojan horse" to turn American into a "welfare-based society." In another episode of *Hannity*, Hannity maintains that World War II helped his father "economically" as a veteran of the war (1/13/2009). He doesn't explain what he means explicitly but a regular viewer has heard Hannity frequently mention, in citing his working-class roots, how proud his father and family were to get a "50 by 100 lot in Franklin Square" Long Island, New York a connection could be made between Hannity's own family history and the G.I. Bill and FHA mortgages.

'Who have We Turned Into?': The Stimulus Bill as a Sign of Generational Transformation and Moral Decline

In early 2009, in the wake of Obama's inauguration and in the months building up to the stimulus package, Fox News hosts and guests continually made grand warnings about the rise of a socialist America and the growing distance between the younger generation and the traditional moral-economic principles of society. In an episode of *The Factor*, O'Reilly questions whether or not, "Americans, some not all of course, are willing to sell out the capitalistic system for Big Brother government to *give* [as opposed to earn] them money" (1/5/2009). In an episode, Hannity voices a similar concern stating: "Has the average American—I do these man on the streets interviews—and I ask people what is the role of government? Has the average American maybe lost touch with our founders and our framers?....Do you think most Americans have been conditioned to think that the government is going to be the answer to every problem they have, and they play on people's fears to get there?" (2/20/2009). In a episode, Beck argues, "Everybody is blaming Madoff or the bankers or Wall Street or Washington. But you know what? You know who ultimately is responsible for everything that we're going through? Us. We the people. It really is, in many ways, our fault, because we have unpegged from principles and values" (2/12/2009). In these quotations, Fox News hosts use terms like "we" and "the average American," but, having long addressed the viewer and the conservative base as the "traditionalist" bloc of the political arena, the viewer is implicitly part of the "not all" hinted at by O'Reilly in the first quote above and is assumed to stand against the political momentum of the moment and the supposed generational-cultural shift it is bringing about.

Now, because of the centrality of the Religious Right in the modern conservative

movement, too often critics assume that Fox News pundits' repeated references to traditional values are always a watchword for religious, culture war issues (e.g. God, guns, and gays). However, the rhetoric of traditional values has been and continues to be used on Fox News to express allegiances to the secular, moral-economic principles of *producerism* as well (see previous chapter). This was especially the case in early 2009 amidst a historic economic crisis and a news environment dominated by economic-related stories. Social welfare is a key political issue in Fox News's programing discourse that especially invokes the moral-economic dimension of traditional values rhetoric. Since the Great Society of the 1960s, the term welfare has carried racial connotations and has been a recurring issue that the conservative movement has politicized in order to align the white working-class with its anti-government agenda.¹³⁵ Thus, Fox News's traditional values rhetoric is not only utilized to differentiate the middle-to-older aged Fox News viewer from the millennial generation but is also used it to distinguish the viewer from another key faction of the Obama coalition: racial minorities, which are of course stereotypically associated with welfare and poverty even though in actuality whites are the predominant users of government assistance and the majority of the poor.¹³⁶ Building on themes articulated in Fox News's coverage of

¹³⁵ In his book, *Unequal Democracy* (2008), political scientist Larry Bartels challenges the notion that "culture war" religious issues trump economic and racial issues amongst white working and middle-class conservatives. His research shows that amongst lower and middle-income conservatives, economic issues and particularly welfare are consistently reported as being of greater importance. Interestingly, Bartels research found that it is in fact more affluent and educated conservatives that rank "culture war" issues above economic issues. This also prompts one to rethink the meaning of traditional values when conservatives use the term (Bartels, 2008, pp. 83-93).

¹³⁶ In their article, "Prime Suspects: The Influence of Local Television News on the Viewing Public," Franklin Gilliam and Shanto Iyengar maintain that "new racism" is centrally expressed through the language of traditional values. They write, "Although the meaning and measurement of the new racism has varied widely from study to study and has been the basis of much controversy, there is a general agreement that racial attitudes have become increasingly tied to

support for traditional values (2000, p. 566). See also (Entman and Rojecki, 2001; Leduff, 2012) In his book *Urban Nightmares* (2006), Steve Macek documents the proliferation of alarmist news specials and magazine cover stories that appeared throughout the eighties and nineties that focused on the so-called “urban crisis.” As an extension of these news stories, Macek exams a wide variety of popular movies during the same period which, like the news, depicted the American inner city as violent, hyper-sexual, immoral, alien, and more than anything else, non-white. Macek demonstrates how in numerous media campaigns conservative pundits and politicians centrally used the rhetoric of “traditional values” and described urban, non-white communities as suffering from moral deficiencies and often what they meant by this was that these communities lacked work ethic and self-reliance. Claiming these communities lacked family values was also crucial, but this too was connected to the idea of a work ethic in that young black men refused to “provide” for the children they fathered. By painting non-white workers as urban, parasitic and lacking a commitment to the family, Macek shows how the popular culture and news media of the 1980s and 1990s discursively stratified the country in terms of morals and virtue and in doing so located white workers, with the rest of the upper-middle class, on top of the American moral hierarchy.

Juxtaposed with the mass media and suburban America’s disgust, and yet fascination with the non-white inner city, from the late 1960s onward the television, radio, and music industries increasingly began view the South and the Midwest as niche-markets, markets that, as they were publicized, represented “authentic,” “wholesome” America. In her book *Heartland TV* (2008), Victoria E. Johnson states, “from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, the Midwest became explicitly re-mapped and reimagined in popular discourse and political rhetoric as the regional and cultural placeholder for patriarchal, white conservatism” (p. 109). Both Macek and Johnson’s work demonstrate the role of the mass media in producing and reinforcing a sense of two divergent regionally, culturally and racially-inflected America’s, one rural and one urban, one in the middle of the continent, one at the coasts, one upholding traditional values and the other threatening them. These separate, yet interdependent mediascapes laid the symbolic groundwork for, what country music scholar J. Lester Feder calls the “geography of values” (2006). Increasingly from the 1990s into the 2000s, the rhetorical device of the red-state/blue-state mapping of the U.S. pervaded not just Fox News programming and the rhetoric of Republican politicians, it gradually became used and accepted by progressive commentators indicating a journalistic consensus over the contours of America’s culture-racial-political terrain. The final result was that existing imagined race-communities produced through the marketing of the entertainment industry and news media were overlaid and entangled with symbols of traditional working-class culture and partisan divisions.

From the 1960s onward, one sees a similar development occur in the political arena. In their article, “The White Ethnic Strategy,” authors Thomas J. Sugrue and John D. Skrenty outline the Nixon campaign’s conscious strategy in the 1968 presidential elections to redraw the electoral map along racial lines in order to marry the Republican Party’s traditional base—the country-club, business elite—with working class voters from the Northeast and the South who, for the previous three decades, faithfully voted Democrat. The politics of white majoritarianism and white supremacy have always played a central role in American history but in the late 1960s and 1970s the authors argue that appeals to whiteness fundamentally changed. Due to the work of the Civil Rights movement combined with the example of Nazism, political claims based on open, biological racism and innate white privilege became, from the postwar onward, illegitimate in the public sphere. Thus, conservative political strategists had to develop more sophisticated ways to instrumentalize race for building political coalitions. Nixon and his Italian-American running mate Spiro Agnew began to model their rhetoric and message around George Wallace’s talking points. Through various gestures of cultural affiliation, Nixon and Agnew reached out to two of the largest culturally distinct demographics in the white working class. They courted white ethnic groups in the Northeast attending, for example, Polish-American Union gatherings and Italian-American

Obama's presidential campaign, from the beginning the network's top programs framed the stimulus as not a method to assuage the crisis but rather as an opportunistic ideological play to expand welfare. Discussing the passing of the stimulus bill, Glenn Beck maintains that Obama, "is about demanding more money to pay for illegal immigrants, to add back welfare that President Clinton rolled back in the mid-1990s, planting the seeds for universal healthcare" (2/9/2009). The day the House of Representatives passed the bill, *Hannity* guest Mike Huckabee also suggests that the stimulus bill is an attempt to reverse Clinton era welfare reform that was grounded on the idea that, Huckabee explains, "you don't get rewarded for not working, you get rewarded for working." In contrast, he says, "In this bill [the stimulus]...the rewards go to the states who add people to the welfare rolls. It is a roll-back to the worst of America's social structure" (2/13/2009). As a guest on *Hannity*, the white construction worker turned conservative media celebrity Joe-the-Plumber tells *Hannity*, "I don't pretend to be an economic wizard here, but the stimulus package he's [Obama] talking about sounds like a handout to me" (1/19/2009). By framing the stimulus bill as nothing but a ruse to

festivals. At the same time, Nixon showed his cultural allegiance to working-class southerners by inviting country singers like Merle Haggard to the White Houses and going to the Grand Ole Opry where he publicly lauded the profound influence of Southern values and culture on America. What is key about Nixon's Southern and Northern ethnic strategy is how it conflated working-class culture, ethnic culture and traditional culture with racial identity. This strategy even started to utilize narratives of marginalization which framed white Americans as a sub-cultural group that was being degraded and victimized by the counter-culture friendly media, riots, crime, and, most of all, by the "hand-outs" of the Great Society. Being more cryptic and open for interpretation, *cultural racism*, as the authors of *Right-Wing Populism* Chip Berlet and Matthew N. Lyons call it, communicates racial allegiance across a spectrum of Anglo-European attitudes about race from moderate to the hard right. The discourse of cultural racism, they argue, is able to unify one group of voters who indeed believe their culture to be the "real" culture of America and thus the superior one, but are turned off by overtly racist rhetoric with another group of voters who still identify with biological white supremacy. Pat Buchanan, political strategist for Richard Nixon and for many other key conservative political figures crystalizes new, modern and cultural racist ideology in his commentary and writing. For example, in his book *Death of the West* (2002), Buchanan warns of the dangers of immigration and argues that a post-majoritarian Anglo-European America will mean the end of America's *traditional* political ideals and cultural values and the demise Western civilization.

advance “nanny state” welfare, Fox News’s top hosts sought to present the bill as favoring nonwhites at the expense of whites and as opposing the traditional values that underpin a work-oriented society.¹³⁷

As such a crucial component of Fox News’s overall interpretative strategy for covering the stimulus debate, racial politics and the traditionalist/non-traditionalist binary would unsurprisingly shade and be woven into Fox News’s engagement with the history of the Great Depression. Long before the late-2000s downturn and before references to the history of Great Depression exploded in the national media because of it, Fox News’s top hosts placed the “Greatest Generation,” their parents’ generation, as the moral bar by which they judged their and subsequent generations. In the W. Bush era and the heyday of Fox News’s “war on terror” discourse, the Greatest Generation was often referenced in relation to World War II, but in the era of the Great Recession, this

¹³⁷ In a January 22, 2009 episode, Sean Hannity criticized Obama advisor Robert Reich for suggesting in a congressional hearing that the jobs programs included in the stimulus bill should be designed to ensure that women and racial minorities—those facing the most severe unemployment and economic challenges—benefit from the bill in addition to white workers. Hannity framed Reich’s comments as proof that Democrats and Obama administration purposely designed the stimulus package to discriminate against white males in favor of minorities and women. Hannity maintained, “Now here I thought the package was intended for everybody. So aren't pink slips colorblind? Now here's hoping Mr. Reich does not have the president's ear on this one.”

Michelle Malkin repeats the idea that the stimulus package gave women and minorities preferential treatment on the same date on Fox News’s daytime, “straight-news” program *America’s Newsroom*. Malkin would again reiterate this idea on another Fox News program on January 23, 2009 titled *Your World w/ Neil Cavuto*. For video see Cavuto, Y. (1/23/2009). *White Males Need Not Apply For Stimulus Package- Racism is Alive and Well in the “White House.”* [Web Video]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nT1TkLgfinE>. Syndicated talk radio host Rush Limbaugh also made this argument on his radio show the same day as well. Limbaugh claimed that Reich, “doesn't want it to go to white construction workers.” On the next day’s program, January 23, 2009, Limbaugh asserted, “And by the way, we’re dedicating today’s program to white construction workers—the white construction workers that we learned yesterday Robert B. Reich said he doesn’t want to received any of the bailout money to infrastructure workers.” See Allison, T. (2009, January 23). Conservative Media Figures Falsely Suggest that Reich Proposed Excluding White Males from Stimulus Package. *MediaMatters for America*. Retrieved from <http://mediamatters.org/research/2009/01/23/conservative-media-figures-falsely-suggest-that/146960>.

generation's experience in the Depression became foregrounded. O'Reilly has referred to his parents as "Depression kids" in past episodes and, especially in the context of early 2009, Hannity repeatedly cited the hardship his parents went through during the Depression. In citing their parents' lived experience, O'Reilly, Hannity, and Beck draw both a genealogical and a cultural kinship with the Greatest Generation and present themselves and implicitly their audience as the modern standard bearers of this generation's legacy. In a March 13, 2009 "You Are not Alone" episode, Beck explicitly draws a comparison between the audience and the Greatest Generation. As a sort of rehearsal to Fox News's April 15 coverage of the national Tea Party protest that would occur just a month later, in this episode the broadcast was linked up to video showing live rallies at different locations across the nation in anticipation for Beck's on-air launching of his 9/12 Project, a political organization that would become a significant faction of the Tea Party Movement. After articulating his populist narrative of the victimized small business owner, which Beck called the "forgotten man," Beck ended this speech with a call to political action asking the audience, "Will you commit yourself to the really live American's time-tested values and principles? Will you..be a watchmen at the gate to alert those still asleep, to rise up, to be America's *next Greatest Generation*?" In this way, Fox News's not only frames its viewers' opposition to the stimulus bill and promotion of free market economic policies as a measure of their commitment to the traditional moral-economic code of producerism but also as a measure of their ties to the Depression generation.

At the same time these connections are established, disconnections are made as well between the Depression generation and *select* segments of the Great Recession generation. In a February 20, 2009 segment of *Hannity* devoted to the history of the

Great Depression, guest Mike Huckabee makes moral-economic contrasts between the generations arguing that, “the fundamental difference between the generation of FDR and my parents and this generation...They really believed that they should make sacrifices so their kids would have a better life” and, in the line that follows, he suggests that by supporting government spending on programs that raise the national debt, “We’re sacrificing our kids for ourselves” (2/20/2009). In an episode just days later, Hannity again draws on his parents’ experience and, like Huckabee, contrasts the moral character of the Depression generation to the contemporary one. “My father grew up during the Depression, literally put cardboard in his shoes, because he couldn’t afford it...They didn’t have healthcare, they didn’t have college tuition, they didn’t have a mortgage or a house guaranteed. When have we taken on this entitlement mentality? (2/24/2009).

By citing their parents’ experience, both commentators tie themselves to the heritage of the Depression generation and, by establishing this cultural anchorage, convey the notion that they and the audience are not part of the larger generational shift and cultural degeneracy. By expressing their parents’ experience through anti-welfare discourse and a free market ideological framework, the moral lessons of the Depression are turned on their head. Huckabee presents a contemporary reliance on collectively funded, communitarian minded social programs as being synonymous with the immorality of “acquisitive individualism.” He equates free market ideology—an ideology underpinned by the principle of acquisitive individualism—with communitarian responsibility and concern. For his part, Hannity interprets his father’s experience and, by extension the Depression generation, as being a bootstrap tale of self-reliance even though it is the Depression generation that is historically distinguished from prior

generations for turning to government in unprecedented ways and degrees to achieve a middle-class life and egalitarian society. This included turning to government programs that offered exactly what Hannity claims the Greatest Generation didn't have: housing via FHA loans and college tuition via the G.I. Bill.

This contradiction creates an interesting challenge for Fox News's attempt to claim the Depression generation's experience as one that affirms and validates their free market, anti-government interpretation of the present economic crisis. In a contradictory fashion, Fox News's top programs present the stimulus act and the New Deal, Obama and FDR as more or less identical. And yet at the same time, the Depression generation, the majority of which were ardent supporters of FDR and were the main beneficiaries of the New Deal, are presented as fundamentally different than Obama's political base and the perceived beneficiaries of the stimulus act. To overcome this challenge, Fox News's top programs work to nullify the Greatest Generation's reliance on New Deal policies (and its viewership's current use of public programs) by presenting these policies as deserved assistance despite their ineffectiveness and misalignment with free market ideology. As I demonstrate, the deservingness of the Depression generation is established by highlighting its producer ethic and, in turn, is cemented by constructing the current recipients of recession-based aid as lacking the same moral character and industriousness. Playing on long established stereotypes about white productiveness and black idleness, Fox News's top programs further separate the Depression generation from Obama's popular base through imagery visually representing the Depression generation as almost exclusively white and the perceived beneficiaries of the stimulus act as predominantly nonwhite. Fox News's top-programs seek de-politicize and make invisible the Depression generation's use of government

programs in the New Deal and their political commitment to FDR and 1930s leftist politics by strategically shifting the modes of analysis and the tone of critique when addressing New Deal policies. By approaching New Deal policies as primarily a technical, empirical question about efficacy, Fox News's top programs can critique the interventionist nature of the New Deal without calling into question the Depression generation's work ethic, self-reliance, and deservingness. In contrast, with coverage of the 2009 stimulus bill debate one sees how the mode of analysis takes on a highly moralistic quality as it centers on the decline of cultural norms concerning work and meritorious economic entitlement.

In a February 17, 2009 episode of *The O'Reilly Factor*, O'Reilly devotes two separate segments to the Great Depression and its parallels with the present. In both segments, O'Reilly and his guests shift between technical and moral modes of critique depending on which economic crisis and policy response they are discussing. In the first segment, guest Neil Cavuto, the host of another Fox program, denounces the efficacy of the New Deal with reference to the "empirical" historical record, telling O'Reilly matter-of-factly, "they [the stock market] know the history on this stuff as you know the history on this stuff. Stimulus, heavy on spending does very little to help us out of a morass." Yet, when O'Reilly turns to the present crisis and asks Cavuto what the average American should be most "afraid of" in today's economic environment. Ironically the financial analyst and "numbers guy" Cavuto responds that the biggest concern they should have is not material-economic concern but a change in cultural norms. He says, "I would be very afraid of the precedent we're setting here, that if you can't pay your mortgage, someone's there to bail you out. If you're falling on tough times, the government's there to help you."

In a later segment of the same episode, O'Reilly discusses the Great Depression and the stimulus with guest conservative writer Larry Elder, an African American commentator who often claims that America is a colorblind society and that the black community suffers from liberal discourses of victimhood and by a deficit in self-discipline and moral character.¹³⁸ O'Reilly tells Elder that, "let's get personal. The reason I wanted

¹³⁸ By identifying a Larry Elder, an African American, with the producerist moral values and the Depression generation, there is a way to see O'Reilly's program as promoting a racially inclusive vision of the conservative movement. I don't rule out the possibility that Fox News's use of minority conservative commentators could in fact produce this kind of reading amongst the audience. However, when one considers the predominant forms of rhetoric that both white and nonwhite commentators use to represent racial minorities in Fox News programming, this performance of an anti-racist stance in the form of featuring minority conservative pundits can be read more as a representational device that enables Fox News programs to continue on constructing racial minorities as *outside* the moral community of the producing class while evading charges that it is doing just that. Media scholar Robert Entman's study (1990) on the representation of the race in local television news programming noted this device being used over two decades ago. He argues that local television news programs espouse forms of anti-racism by diversifying their newsrooms and by denouncing older forms of racism at the same time and precisely because they advance what he calls "modern racism."

Often, Fox News pundits vehemently oppose older forms of *overt* racism like discourses of biological racial inferiority or pro-segregationist practices—forms of racism that have become deviant in mainstream culture and no longer have a central place in politics. However, this often gives cover for the use of more *subtle*, modern forms of racism that are central to contemporary political discourse and still widely circulate in popular culture. Unlike the biological conception of race that views racial characteristics as universal and immutable, the modern cultural form of racism offers a rationale for explaining why most minorities lack the moral and cultural norms of whites and yet some minorities, like the conservative pundit expressing culturally racist views, possess the correct values and were able to transcend their moribund race-based culture.

There are other examples of conservative minority pundits using racially tinged, anti-welfare discourses. Sara Parker, an African American women and Michelle Malkin, a Filipino American woman, both discuss the supposed deficit of moral-economic principles amongst the African American audience members in analyzing the clip on Beck and both have made similar points about communities of color in their commentary and writing more generally. Michelle Malkin, from the earliest stages of her career, has been an outspoken critic of welfare and affirmative action and has written various books, editorials, and blogs that express thinly veiled and sometimes naked racism. For example, two of her best selling books are titled *In Defense of Internment: The Case for 'Racial Profiling' in World War II and the War on Terror* (2004) and *Invasion: How America Still Welcomes Terrorists, Criminals, and Other Foreign Menaces to Our Shores* (2002). Sara Parker works for a free market think tank called the Center for Urban Renewal and Education (CURE) that conducts political campaigns and policy initiatives that use anti-racist, black liberation discourses to roll back welfare programs. Appearing on other major conservative programs like *Rush Limbaugh Show*, Sara Parker often tells an auto-biographical story of cultural conversion from, using the language of her bio on her website, "grip of welfare dependency" to the principles of political conservatism and the free market. <http://www.urbancure.org/starparker.asp>.

you on for this segment is Larry Elder's father, who's still alive, 93 years old, was a janitor...you [addressing Elder] worked yourself up from South Central to the Hollywood Hills. You are a self-made man...But the trend now with President Obama is, we'll do it for you. The government will save your butt." Elder says, "I was just talking to my dad the other day. My dad was a teenager when the Great Depression started. He was 24 or so when it ended." Once Elder moves from the more general topic of the Depression to his critique of the New Deal, he switches from a personal point of discussion to citing statistical economic indices that compare the efficacy of FDR's policies in the 1930s to president Ronald Reagan's policy response to the early 1980s recession. As the discussion moves to the stimulus act, however, Elder, like Cavuto, adopts a moral mode of analysis and argues that the stimulus bill and Obama have backward principles, "bailing out all these people rewarding people for irresponsibility." Like other Fox News's hosts, Elder enhances his authority to speak for the Depression generation's experience by stressing his proximity to it through close family ties. By O'Reilly citing Elder's father's occupation as a janitor and then stressing how Elder "worked" his way up from South Central to the Hollywood Hills, O'Reilly ties Elder to the Depression generation not only genealogically but by defining both Elder and his father by hard work. O'Reilly uses Elder's social origins, the son of a janitor, and subsequent success to intentionally demonstrate a free market vision of a meritocratic, work-based society, which O'Reilly suggests is threatened by "the trend now with president Obama."

Not only is this representational strategy of shifting modes of analysis deployed within segments, one sees this representational strategy deployed across episodes. This is particularly evident in a group of back-to-back episodes of *Glenn Beck* program that focused on the Depression and aired February 9, 2009 through February 12, 2009—

the same days the stimulus bill was passed by the senate and was going through the joint conference committee for its final congressional approval. Encouraging his viewers to tune in for the following week's focus on the history of the New Deal, Beck tells his audience, "If you want to see the similarities between FDR's New Deal, which prolonged the Depression, and Obama's stimulus, wait until you see...it is amazing. I mean, it's the same damn thing" (2/9/2009). In each episode on the Depression, Beck consistently announces that his goal is to highlight the parallels between the 1930s Depression and the late-2000s Recession and use "history as a point of reference" for understanding the current situation. In comparison to segments on the stimulus and the Obama administration that preceded or followed them, this segment reveals the more implicit way Beck's program constructs key differences between past and present crises and between the Depression generation and Obama's popular political base. When critiquing New Deal policies, Beck heavily relies on academic guests, scholarship on economic history, and statistical data. However, when critiquing the Obama administration, the stimulus and the contemporary political environment, Beck turns to discourses of generational transformation and moral-cultural decline and relies on popular journalists and political pundits for analysis and opinion.

The February 11 and 12 episodes of *Glenn Beck* are particularly illustrative examples of how analytical and visual representational approaches change with the era being addressed. In both these episodes, the segment on the New Deal was directly preceded by segments focusing on the same February 10 town hall meeting president Barack Obama held in Fort Myers, Florida in order to stress the need for the stimulus package. In the February 11 episode, Beck begins the segment by asking, "the stimulus package, is it going to fix the economy?" and introduces his guests, Steve Moore from

the Wall Street Journal and Star Parker, the president of CURE, a free market think tank that focuses on urban renewal. Moore is the first guest to respond and says with a smirk on his face, "Is that a trick question? Hell no, it isn't going to fix it." After some discussion about the stimulus policy, Beck segues to a video clip of an exchange between Obama and an audience member at the Fort Myers town hall meeting. Again, as the topic of discussion shifts from the stimulus to the video clip, the mode of analysis shifts from economic expertise to moral analysis of individuals and interpersonal interactions. For this moral and social analytical approach, Beck does not turn to Moore, a white male and self-described economist. Instead, he turns to Star Parker, an African American woman who has made a career in conservative media telling her *personal* story about her "first-hand experience in the grip of welfare dependency."¹³⁹ Setting the interpretive frame for the clip he is about to show, Beck says to Star, "I want to go to you, I want to play something that happened yesterday during the president's speech. Some people stood up and started asking him, "Hey, how do I get mine?" Beck then cues the video. The viewer sees an older African American woman standing in the audience with microphone by her face. She says, indicating she is homeless, "we need something more than vehicles and parks to go to. We need our own kitchen and our own bathroom. Please help" she ends in a pleading tone, close to tears. The video shows Obama approach her and tell her that, "we're going to do everything we can to help you...I'll have my staff talk to you after this town hall." After the clip, Parker responds with a comment about how the wife of a Republican senator ended up helping the woman get a house and argues that this shows how private philanthropy works better than public welfare. While Parker's argument fits Beck's anti-government message, it

¹³⁹ See Star Parker's biography on the CURE website <http://www.urbancure.org/starparker.asp>.

misses the essential point of Beck's pre-framing of the clip, that is, how the audience exchanges at Obama's town hall meeting exemplify a "how do I get mine" mentality. "Star," Beck says to clarify the intended take away from the clip, "she just went to the president of the United States and said, "I need a new house," and then she got one."

After referencing two other notable audience exchanges at the town hall event, Beck says, "You know what this president is doing right now? He is addicting this country to heroin, the heroin that is government slavery." Parker responds, "I agree with you 100 percent...This is why the stimulus bill is not going to work is because all of this government. What they haven't asked is: how did we get into this problem? [referring to the recession] We got into this problem because of too much government, and their solution is more government." After some discussion Beck foreshadows the next segment on the history of the Depression by saying, "Star, you said it just a minute ago, "Nobody is asking how we even got into this problem. Everyone is talking about the solution...I contend that the solution is the problem." Missing the historical emphasis of Beck's comment, Moore chimes in, "Everything that the government has done for the last six months, the bailouts, everything." Beck says, "no, but it's beyond that." Parker interjects, "Try sixty years. They've already tested this stuff in the inner cities." Moore returns and finishes his point about government spending and then says, closing the segment out, "you know what most Americans think of this [the clip]? Get a job!"

In the following day's episode, Beck has conservative pundit and Tea Party activist Michelle Malkin as a guest. Beck asks Malkin, a Filipino American woman, to respond to a sequence of three video clips from the same Fort Myers town hall event. In this sequence, Malkin and the viewer are first shown a clip of a middle-aged, African American man who asks president Obama about a better way to maintain government

assistance in the face of sporadic fluctuations of monthly income and employment. The second clip replays the video from the previous episode of the older African American women seeking housing. The last clip shows a question posed from an excited (star struck), white male in his late teens who indicates that he works at McDonald's. The millennial generation worker asks Obama about how he would address some of the problems workers like himself face with the lack of job mobility and stagnate wages and benefits. After playing these clips, the camera returns to the mid-shot of Beck. He cocks his head with a grimaced look and says, "Michelle, hmm...who have we turned into? Malkin responds, "I'm appalled that the culture of entitlement has exploded so much that people don't think twice [have no shame about] when these audience members go seeking absolution and all sorts of "manna from heaven" from the president of the United States." Reflecting on his own cultural impulses and moral grounding, Beck says, "My gosh, I couldn't imagine asking that." "Yes," Malkin responds, "we've become a nation of moochers."

Threading together Beck's framing of the stimulus bill and the Obama administration with framing that was used by Fox News in its coverage of Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, Malkin continues, "I made this observation back during the campaign when we saw a very similar video clip, which I know you've played on your radio show and, which has been played on Fox News a lot, of another Obama supporter." "Here," Beck says, "We have the clip." A highly pixelated video is shown of a young, African American woman with her daughters in the crowd at Obama's victory speech. A reporter asks her why she was so moved by the moment and she responds, "Because I never thought this day would happen. I won't have to worry about putting gas in my car. I won't have to worry about paying my mortgage. You know, if I help him,

he's going to help me." The screen shot returns to Beck. He repeats the woman's statements slowly while shaking his head in disbelief. Malkin says, with a smile on her face, "that's right. Loaves and fishes multiply, pork and Kool-Aid falls from the sky!" Not acknowledging the overt racism of Malkin's comments, Beck simply says, "Well, Michelle, let me give you two quotes. Thomas Jefferson said: [a quote appears on screen as Beck reads it] "Democracy will cease to exist when you take away from those who are willing to work and give it to those who don't." This is followed by a similarly themed quote from Benjamin Franklin. In this way, Beck caps off the segment by counterpoising the racialized construction of the stimulus and Obama's popular base of support encapsulated by the Jefferson quote with the traditional moral-economic values of producer republicanism.

Throughout this episode, a banner at the bottom of screen periodically appears that reads in ominous, shadowy letters "The Road to Socialism." This phrase and graphic works as a thematic link that ties the Fort Myers town hall segment with the historical segment that follows and, because it appeared in the previous three episodes, makes thematic connections across the week's episodes as well. Used in the context of Beck's program, "socialism" is a stigmatized way to signify government intervention in the private economy, with both the stimulus bill and the New Deal represented as "dangerous" historic moments of intervention. However, when one compares the differences in the types of analyses Beck's program applies to the stimulus-related segments and the segments on the Great Depression, one finds Beck's critique of New Deal intervention (or "socialism") lacks the same type of moral condemnation that one sees in his discussion of the stimulus bill and Obama. For example, in the February 9 episode, a segment critiques FDR's interventionist approach by using a historical

comparison that contrasts the New Deal to presidents Harding and Coolidge's free market approach to the so called "forgotten depression" of 1920-1921. Statistical modes of analysis, policy events and the citation of Hayekian economic theory are used to highlight the New Deal's failure and the triumph of free market policies in fixing the recession of the early 1920s. Beck's February 10 segment on the Depression shared the statistical orientation of the previous episode but instead focused on the theme of the New Deal's wastefulness and *ineffectiveness*, again not the morality or immorality of New Deal policies or the people that relied on them.

The February 11 and 12 episodes do, however, have a moral bent. The emphasis in these episodes is on how the New Deal and the labor movement "crushed" small businesses and created crony capitalist alliances between big business and government. Beck and his academic guest valorize business figures like Henry Ford for opposing the New Deal and villainize labor unions like the UAW for being used, quoting Beck, "as a weapon against business" that was "wielded by the federal government" and, Folsom adds after Beck, the Democratic Party. By presenting union workers as belligerent toward business and private property, Beck and his guest do critique the working-class of the Depression generation in moral terms on one level.¹⁴⁰ However, in

¹⁴⁰ While Glenn Beck and his guest historian Burton Folsom Jr. mentioned the leftist radicalism of the 1930s working-class, they downplay it by presenting counter examples of workers defending their bosses in the face of the New Deal's oppression. One anecdote Folsom offers to demonstrate the mutual affection between the working-class and the business class during the 1930s is about a man named Fred Perkins who owned a company making storage batteries and lightening equipment for farms and who was arrested for breaking the wage rates of the NRA. In these two episodes, Folsom maintains that his employees agreed to lower pay so the company could remain solvent. Folsom goes on to describe how Perkins' employees even visited him in jail and testified on his behalf in court. In their discussion on Henry Ford, Beck stresses how well Ford took care of his workers and how Ford did not get the crony capitalist, government contracts that GM received because of Ford's opposition to the New Deal. Beck goes on to make a connection from this to the Obama administration current relation with the top three automakers and "Big Labor" in the contemporary moment.

these two episodes and in all the episodes that Beck gives substantial attention to the history of the Depression, Beck's program is careful not to describe New Deal policies using the language of welfare, idleness, and dependency and, as a result, the analysis never puts in question the work ethic and moral character of the generation who most benefited from and identified politically with the New Deal. In contrast to Beck's segments on the Depression, his analysis of the stimulus and Obama's popular base is saturated with anti-welfare discourse and is centrally about the question of moral integrity and work ethic. Through the juxtaposition of these segments and through the selective presence and absence of anti-welfare discourses, Beck seeks to present the Depression generation as fundamentally different from Obama's political base and in so doing reassures the audience that while he is faulting the New Deal for having the same big government mindset as the stimulus bill, he is not faulting the Depression generation itself.

Attaching Racial Identities to Past and Present Crises through the Visuals

Up until this point I have primarily discussed how this generational-cultural difference is expressed in the verbal rhetoric of Fox News programs. Another crucial way distinctions are drawn between the Depression generation and the contemporary one is through the visual imagery that Fox News programs use to represent the two eras and crises. Often, when politicians and media figures are publicly accused of racism it's because they were caught using overtly racist language such as when radio host Don Imus' described the Rutgers women's basketball team as "nappy-headed hoes" or Malkin's statements cited above about "pork and Kool-Aid falling from the sky." While this is the more common way of understanding racial stereotyping on television, it is also

the more exceptional and marginal way in which racial stereotypes are produced. I argue that the more typical and central way Fox News and other television news programs construct racial identities and encode them with negative cultural characteristics is through coordinating particular background images that are shown on screen with the verbal rhetoric of the hosts and guests.¹⁴¹ Through the interplay of image, text, verbal speech, in the following section I will demonstrate how Fox News programs construct racial differences between the Depression generation and the generation of the Great Recession in a far subtler but no less intelligible way than overt racial rhetoric.



Image 3.2: FDR’s “white” Depression and Obama’s “non-white” Recession

In a February 10, 2009 segment on the New Deal, Beck begins the segment by criticizing Obama’s Treasury Secretary, Timothy Gietner, for the idea that, quoting Beck, “we going to try things we’ve never tried before [in terms of economic policy].” He then asks guest historian Burton Folsome Jr., who appears in a video window, if the “sprit of the New Deal” had a similar experimentation approach. Folsome affirms Beck’s parallel

¹⁴¹ In their book, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (2001) Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki demonstrate how images of African Americans are consistently coded in the media, especially in television news, as being tied to “welfare,” “laziness,” and “urban poverty” (pp. 8,49).

between the New Deal and the stimulus and goes on to cite policies and agencies created in the Depression that, he argues, hurt the economy and increased unemployment. As he does this, a sequence of Depression era images appear on the screen next to the video chat windows. One image shows a panicked crowd at the New York Stock Exchange, the next shows middle-aged men eating at a soup kitchen, and the last shows images of Franklin Roosevelt and men standing in lines for food or employment (see image 3.2 left side). After Folsom makes his last point that, “in the first two terms of the Roosevelt, we simply did NOT [saying emphatically] get out of the Depression,” Beck transitions and, again, draws parallels to the present. He tells Folsom that, “look, I’m a small business guy, I make cupcakes... there is no way I would invest in this atmosphere because the government is going to try things they’ve [gesturing scare quotes] “never tried before.” Isn’t this exactly why the Depression lasted so long because business people could never trust...the whole rules of the game were going to change in the next year or next month?” Folsom responds to Beck’s question by again citing New Deal policies and the economic statistics from the 1930s and as he does this, the viewer is given another sequence of images. This time, video footage displays scenes of contemporary economic distress: state employment offices and job fairs interspersed with images of president Obama (see image 3.2 right side). Neither Beck nor his guest comment on this temporal shift in the visual imagery and continue on with their discussion about New Deal policy. Like the Depression era footage that preceded it, this contemporary footage focuses on unemployment lines and includes images of the current president, the figurehead of the modern state. Unlike the Depression footage that preceded it, the contemporary footage is predominantly filled by African American faces and bodies and the policy response is symbolized by an African

American president.¹⁴²

In this episode as well in other Fox News programs, the Depression era photography and film almost always predominantly features white individuals (most often male) and almost always excludes images of people of color. Thus, at least at the level of visual representation, FDR, the New Deal, and the Depression itself are presented as historical referents that are exclusive to a white experience and a white past. In reinforcing a white image of the Depression's history, Fox News's visual representation of the crisis allows the predominantly white Fox News audience to identify with Depression era poverty on one hand and disidentify with nonwhite victims of the current crisis who do not *look* like them on the other. In addition, this exclusively white depiction of the Depression era allows the viewer to question the merits of the New Deal and FDR on the basis of efficacy and still accept FDR and the New Deal as key symbols of the nation's history and/or their family history.

Read in another way, however, one could see this juxtaposition of past and present images as having a politically progressive quality. By including images of nonwhite victims of the downturn, Beck's program does not repeat, in its visual representation of the contemporary crisis, the same white-centric vision that Depression era documentary photography and film predominantly exhibited. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of these two sequences of images could encourage the viewer to make

¹⁴² In one snippet of Depression era footage that Beck's program shows in this episode does feature one African American man amidst numerous whites in a soup kitchen, the Depression era footage Beck uses here and in other episodes overwhelmingly features white figures. This is true of other Fox News programs that have segments on the Depression. In Hannity's special on the Depression just a week later, for example, not a single person of color was shown in any of the Depression era photos or footage that was used (2/20/2009). Women are mostly absent from Fox News's use of Depression era footage as well. In turn, while the contemporary video of job fairs and state employment offices that Beck's program references include Caucasian individuals, non-white individuals pervade the scenes that are shown and this stands in stark contrast to the nearly all white Depression footage that is used.

sympathetic connections between the Depression era hardship (which the viewer is invited to identify with) and the hardship felt by racial minorities and the working poor in the current crisis. Though this type of connection and interpretation is potentially available in this segment, it is made less likely by the way the visual representation of African Americans is pre-coded by the producerist discourse political conservatives and Fox News have used in the past and is recoded through the producerist rhetoric Beck and his guests use just before and during the segment. As evident in the analysis of video clips from the Fort Myers town hall event, *selective* images that foreground racial minorities on Fox News often correspond with proclamations of a *general* lack of work ethic or traditional moral-economic values in society. This slippage between the socially nonspecific nature of Beck's moral condemnations against "society" in his verbal rhetoric and the specific focus on minorities in the program's visual editing conceals the process by which racial identifiers are attached to the program's principal interpretative categories: conservative/liberal, traditional/nontraditional, producer/parasite, the Greatest Generation/today's generation.

While the Depression generation's producer ethic is significantly constructed in contradistinction to the visual representation of idle/or dependent racial minorities, the link between the Depression generation and the producer ethic must be constructed in a positive manner as well. Coupling scenes of white hardship and government relief with scenes of white, *productive* labor turns the Depression generation's hardship into a greater source of identification and makes it more worthy of public concern. In short, white hardship alone does not warrant the Fox News viewer's sympathy; it must be attached to a producer ethic to endow it with deservingness. This is evident specifically in Beck and Malkin's inclusion of the white McDonald's worker in the "nation of

moochers” and more generally in the regular framing of younger whites of the millennial generation and racial minorities as lacking the same producerist moral values (see image 3.3 below). Not only is the Greatest Generation treated as sacrosanct in the verbal rhetoric of Fox News pundits, the visual images that the Glenn Beck and Hannity use in their segments on the Depression reinforces the work ethic (and manhood) of the Depression generation. Unlike the images Fox News programs use to depict segments of the current generation experiencing the recession which occlude images of young and/or nonwhite labor and foreground assistance seeking (see image 3.3), the Depression era footage that appears on Beck and Hannity’s programs include as many scenes of deprivation and public aid as scenes which depict middle-aged, white bodies toiling on roads, in farm fields and in factories (see image 3.4).

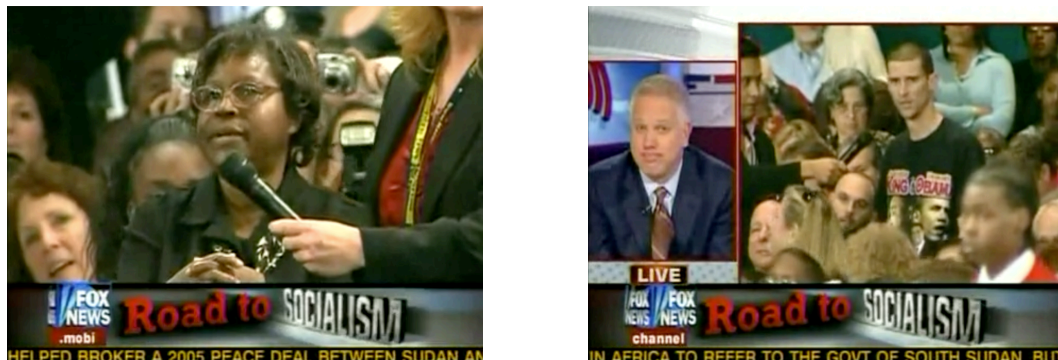


Image 3.3: Fort Myers town hall footage



Image 3.4: the blue-collar and masculine representation of Depression era workers

The image of the producer in American political discourse, including leftist variations of producerist discourse, has historically been primarily a white image (Kazin, 1998; Roediger, 1991), but maintaining the link between the Depression generation's whiteness and their productiveness/worthiness in the present is not automatically guaranteed.¹⁴³ It is contingent on continued attempts to reinscribe their work ethic and valor. Furthermore, when represented in partisan media like Beck's program, the worthiness of whiteness and the Depression generation are also contingent on partisan affiliation as liberal whiteness is framed as a whiteness without work ethic and merit.

How the Manliness of New Deal Producerism Aids Conservative Populism in a Post-industrial Depression

At the very end of the February 11, 2009 episode of *Glenn Beck*, Beck again singles out a video clip of the young, white audience member from the Fort Myers event or, the "McDonald's Guy" as Beck calls him and maintains that the young worker lacks producerist cultural values. Beck says that he doubts the McDonald's Guy "supports the nine principles" of Beck's "you're not alone" project (what would become the 9/12

¹⁴³ Assessing the broad scope of American populist rhetoric overall, Michael Kazin writes, "the rising of "the people" was an avowedly white affair; the democratic vision rarely extended across the color line" (1998, pp. 14-15). Also see (Roediger, 1991).

Project). The key contrast between the younger, McDonalds worker in the contemporary footage and the workers that are displayed in the Depression era footage is that Depression era workers are shown doing blue-collar labor and the McDonald's worker is tied to the service industry. The majority of today's working-class work in the service sector and are women and this form of work, in being less masculine, is estranged from the images of productive labor that have been the most prominent in the history of American political culture, namely, as artisan, agricultural, and industrial forms of manual work.¹⁴⁴

Since the infamous "Hard Hat Riot" in 1970s, when large group of AFL-CIO construction workers attacked anti-war protesters in down town New York City, the image of tradesmen and construction workers has been tied to conservative politics. This symbolic link between construction workers and conservative politics gives conservative populism a deep cultural bearing because construction work remains one of the few working-class jobs today that shares a strong resemblance with the traditional iconography of productive labor. In their verbal rhetoric, conservatives said they embraced Joe-the-Plumber because he represented the aspirations and interests of small business owners. In addition to small business ownership, however, Joe-the-Plumber was a useful political symbol for conservatives because he also represented, on a more visual level, the residual, manly image of the industrial workforce and the American working-class.

¹⁴⁴ A 2009 Labor Bureau and Statistics report shows that 46% of the American workforce is employed in the service sector and 23% work in blue-collar jobs—defined here as transportation, manufacturing and construction-related jobs. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ocwage.nr0.htm>. See Cook, N. (2010, May 16). Blue-Collar Blues: As the Economy Rebounds, Can We Transform America's Service Sector Jobs into Higher-Paying Careers? *The Daily Beast*. Retrieved from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2010/05/17/blue-collar-blues.print.html>. Eric Olin Wright et al maintain that, "the majority of the working class in the United States consists of women (53.6%). See (Wright, 1982, p. 722).

The divergent way in which Fox News treats Joe-the-Plumber and the young McDonalds worker—both white workers—and the divergent way in which Fox News represents the working-class of the Great Depression era and segments of the working-class of the Great Recession era shed light on the symbolic interdependency between industrial conceptions of productive labor, whiteness, and masculinity. If one piece of the triumvirate is absent, the remaining two pieces have a diminished status. For example, the white McDonald's worker has less of a claim to the producer image because his labor is feminized. Conversely, it is not a coincidence that the World War II poster of "Rosie the Riveter"—still one of the most iconic and celebrated images of female worker empowerment—depicts an *industrial* female worker flexing her arm, i.e. taking on masculine qualities. One must acknowledge that while Fox News and the New Right before it has taken advantage of these connotations, the conservative movement did not create this chain of associations.

This chain of associations was articulated and solidified by a leftwing brand of producer populism that the labor movement and the New Deal coalition deployed in the 1930s. Sociologist Julie Bettie maintains that because women and people of color had been systematically excluded from industrial, union activity, claiming the category of productive labor was, she writes, "the exclusive domain of white working men." Thus, she continues, "the historic "making of the American working class," as well as its representation in culture, makes it difficult to envision white women and people of color as working-class. Because working-class is identified with industrial labor, nonindustrial, nonunionized jobs, held largely by white women and people of color, appear to be outside the working-class category [and I would add the category of producer]" (1995, p. 134). Commenting particularly on the New Deal coalition and the Popular Front,

historian Elizabeth Faue maintains that, “Women remained in a marginal and subordinated position in the movement excluded both from the arrangements of power *and* [my emphasis] from the symbolic system of [productive] labor” (1991, p. 20).

The historical scholarship of George Lipsitz has shown how the New Deal coalition’s gendered and white conception of productive labor and class struggle informed the type of economic policies and occupations the New Deal political project favored (1998, 2001, pp. 47-50). For example, Lipsitz shows how some of the most important policies that came out of the New Deal such as the Wagner Act and the Social Security Act did not apply to the domestic and farm work sectors of the labor market, the sectors most occupied by women and people of color. While New Dealers’ use of a masculine, white and primarily industrial image of the producing class was politically useful in the 1930s, the New Deal coalition’s inability and unwillingness to incorporate the types of labor and occupations women and people color were employed into the benefit structure of the New Deal and into the New Deal iconography of the producing class came back to haunt, as Lipsitz stresses, the Democratic left as the conservative movement would invert the political meaning of this iconography in later decades.

During the 1960s and 1970s, during the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial economy, the U.S. class structure and labor market would go through drastic changes.¹⁴⁵ As the service sector jobs exploded, in the 1970s women workers began to flood the ranks of post-industrial proletariat and, with these changes, increasingly female-headed households were replacing the traditional lunch pail, blue-collar father figure of the postwar period (Stacey, 1990). Because the Democratic left and Great

¹⁴⁵ Julie Bettie (1995) outlines this shift writing, “In 1959, 60 percent of those employed worked in the production of goods and 40 percent in services. By 1985, only 26 percent produced goods while service occupations increased to 74 percent (pp. 132-33).

Society supported and took on, to a degree, the politics and demands of the race-based movements and women's movements in the 1960s and 1970s, the liberal political identity became associated with this new bloc of female workers and the existing bloc of nonwhite workers. In the name of these factions of the working-class, the Democratic Party raised issues that had been traditionally associated with producerist ethics such as establishing *fair pay* for women and minority workers and, through correcting historical discrimination, establishing a employment environment truly organized by *hard work* and *merit-based* advancement. However, because the working-class and the producer ethic was semantically attached to masculinity, whiteness and industrial labor, the political culture of the era did not register (and still does not register) the demands of the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s through the moral logic of producerism and, as result, the grievances that these movements voiced were not widely intelligible as class grievances. Because the Democratic left in a past era had not reconfigured the New Deal's brand of producerism in way that was more racially and gender inclusive and in a way that was more responsive to the new reality of the post-industrial labor market, female and nonwhite factions of the working-class were not easily seen as class allies and as fellow producers next to the declining but still significant bloc of white, male blue-collar workers.

This disconnect facilitated the conservative movement's ability to politically position the white working-class against female and minority workers in the 1960s and 1970s and capture the white working-class vote and with it the powerful symbolism of productive labor that white, male blue-collar workers embodied. Exploiting the unresolved contradictions of the New Deal coalition, conservatives began to use producer populism to politically divide the working-class by race and gender. Moreover,

because women and minority workers had been long excluded from the symbolic imagery of productive labor, the resonant moral claim of producer populism could not be easily used to shield or counter the conservative backlash that swiftly followed the policy gains women and minorities made in the 1960s and 1970s. While African-American leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. attempted to frame the nonwhite working-class as an underpaid, low-wage bloc of workers whose labor facilitated the high living standard of middle-class whites by giving them cheap services, conservative populists were more effective at framing the same group of workers as coddled welfare parasites (King, 2010, p. 7). Feminist activists and intellectuals in roughly the same era attempted to highlight how women workers were in essence double-producers carrying an economic load as workers in the paid workforce and as workers in the unpaid sphere of the home. However, in questioning the commitment of women workers to motherhood and by blaming the so called “moral decay” of society (a precursor term to “family values”) on the decline of stay at home mothers (as if working-class women had a choice to not enter the paid workforce), conservative populists played up the gender identity of the new bloc women workers and in doing so effectively obscured their labor and class identity.¹⁴⁶

The absence of the multiracial, gender inclusive brand of proletarian producerism facilitated the conservatives’ ability to roll back the policy gains that women and

¹⁴⁶ Feminist scholars have long examined and critiqued traditional, male-centric conceptions of class and classed labor and have pointed to the deeply gendered quality of the labor market and occupational ladder. Garnsey’s (1982) research has discussed the way in which individual versus family conceptions of class complicate the term as well as blue-collar versus pink-collar distinctions. Following Garnsey’s work, Rosemary Crompton (1993) has stressed how the gender segregation of the labor market makes it difficult to speak of men and women as occupying the same class. For similar debates, also see (Rubin, 1994; Hartmann, 1979). As mentioned in chapter three, producerist arguments were used by second wave feminist activists in the 1970s and 1980s to achieve recognition of and fair remuneration for the labor of the home, the “second shift” as Arlie Hochschild refers to it in her book by that title.

minorities made in the 1960s and 1970s. With no countervailing leftist vision of who the producing class is, from the 1960s to the present day politics of the Great Recession, conservatives have been able to politically position the white working-class against female and minority workers by painting racial minorities as parasites and by not recognizing female labor as equally productive as male labor.

Chapter Four Conclusion

Across Fox News's top-three programs, there is an attempt to present the conservative movement as the modern guardian of the Depression generation's moral-economic principles. On the basis of these values, Fox News programs recast the Depression generation's legacy and the Great Depression itself as part of the conservative political tradition.¹⁴⁷ However, to doing this, as I have shown, requires a double-movement. On one hand, Fox News programs must present the principles of the stimulus bill and Obama's popular base as antithetical to the producerist values of the Depression generation. On the other hand, the Depression generation's political ties to FDR and the Democratic Party and their reliance on New Deal policies must be de-

¹⁴⁷ In chapter eight "Say Don't You Remember" of his new book *Pity the Billionaire: the Hard-Times Swindle and the Unlikely Comeback of the Right* (2012), political commentator and cultural critic Thomas Frank's notes the way in which the conservative movement in the Recession era attempt to claim the history of the Great Depression as part of the conservative political tradition and he stresses how conservative political actors appropriated what he calls "the cultural patterns of the thirties." He even mentions conservative historian Amity Shlaes' book *The Forgotten Man* (2007), a term and book I focus on at length in chapter five. Like usual, Frank's target of analysis is sharp for acknowledging the importance and significance of the conservative movement's attempt to rewrite the history of the Depression. However, Frank's analysis does not offer a in depth and comprehensive analysis of what the "cultural patterns of the thirties" are and how exactly the Right was able to effectively appropriate them and shift their political orientation. He also sees the Right's appropriation of elements of Depression era politics as merely an "act of theft" and, in framing the right's appropriation of Depression era culture as pure theft, his analysis overlooks the critical continuities between modern conservative populism and New Deal populism that facilitated and made possible the modern right's usage of the iconography of the "hard times" of the Depression era, i.e. the reactionary race and gender politics of the 1930s.

politicized and turned into a question of technical efficacy or occluded from the discussion altogether. Noticeably absent from Fox News's engagement with the history of the Depression is the New Deal's greatest, most enduring policy achievement: social security. Mirroring the perspective many Tea Party activists hold about their own dependence on government programs like social security and Medicaid, the issue of the Depression generation's dependency on New Deal programs is nullified by a taken-for-granted notion that they deserved such assistance. One can read the occlusion of the Social Security Act in Fox News's retelling of Depression's history as a simple partisan ploy to hide one of the Democratic Party's most successful and popular programs. However, in playing on the viewer's preconceived image of the Depression generation and foregrounding this generation's whiteness, manliness and work ethic, bringing up social security becomes unnecessary because it is already assumed that the Depression generation's reliance on New Deal policies were naturally tied to work-based contributions and used by people of moral integrity. In this way, the New Deal's most important piece of legislation, one many of Fox News's audience members depend on to this day, is presented as sharing a moral affinity with capitalism, because it too is organized by producerist principles and work-based contribution. The racial and moral thematic structure of Fox News's programs determines which generation and group is deserving and underserving, which government program is exempt from its free market critique and which is deemed to be taking us down the road to socialism. By overlaying their free market political economic critique of the New Deal with the moral discourse of producerism, Fox News's top programs were able to assert that the Greatest Generation's reliance on New Deal welfare didn't really count as welfare. While the interventionist policies of FDR and the New Deal may have been inefficient, ineffective

and hostile to business, they weren't like the socialist policies of Obama and the Stimulus Act.

Chapter Five: Fox News, a Place for Intellectuals?: How Fox News uses Expert Knowledge without Being Elitist Snobs

[The] translation of official viewpoints into a public idiom not only makes the former more 'available' to the uninitiated; it invests them with popular force and resonance, naturalizing them within the horizon of understandings of the various publics.

—Hall et al, 1981

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how Fox's top programs used iconic images from the Depression era showing scenes of soup kitchens and unemployment lines. This was done to engage the Great Depression as remembered in the collective memory of the nation and to bring the "ordinary" viewer into an academic discussion about the policies of the New Deal. Second, I showed how Fox News's top programs interpreted the Depression's history through the lens of network's existing populist binaries of the producers and the parasites, the traditionalist and non-traditionalist as a way to identify the Depression generation and Depression itself with the conservative base and the conservative political tradition. What has not been addressed thus far is the content of Fox News's critique of the New Deal and how this critique is made. In this section, I will illustrate how Fox News's top programs mobilize expert knowledge in order to make an intellectual and empirical critique of New Deal policies and, by extension, the stimulus bill. In looking at how Fox News's top programs engage the history of the Depression at an academic level, one gets a sense of how versatile Fox News's top

programs are in making political arguments and in interpreting the news.

During the Recession, Fox News's top-programs did not cease to cover tabloid-esque stories about celebrity scandals and other sensational stories like the "teenage 'sexting' epidemic," that more easily lend themselves to emotional and moralistic modes of analysis. Yet, an equal if not larger part of Fox News's editorial agenda covered the "serious," "hard" news topics of government policy, most notably economic policy. The two fields of knowledge that became central in the news media in early 2009, economics and economic history, have a strong quantitative, materialist orientation and tend to necessitate expert-driven, empirical modes of argumentation. However, even in a news environment saturated with statistic heavy, economic-related stories and expert opinion from economists, Fox News's top programs did not abandon their use of populist rhetorical frames and moral discourses. Instead, they did something brilliant but difficult. They incorporated professional discourses and intellectual knowledge *into* their larger populist representational strategy for covering the Recession.

As I've argued in chapter one, a fundamental way that Fox News's top hosts to present themselves as "regular guys" and build the network's populist brand is by performing a hostility toward formal expertise, highbrow taste, and educated elites. In turn, Fox News's top programs are unique in television news because they incorporate into their broadcasting model and journalistic address an attempt to give voice to a working-class brand of intellectuality, what I have referred to as the "popular intellect." Because this has been a crucial way in which Fox News has distinguished itself in the news market, critics often focus solely on the top programs' populist and tabloid qualities and, from this, deem Fox News programs to be anti-intellectual and void of professional analysis. However, a closer look at Fox News programming reveals that the network's

hostility toward intellectuals and the professional-educated class is in fact contradictory and strategically selective.

This selectiveness was no more apparent than during 2009 when an unprecedented amount of academics, think tank researchers, and experts appeared on Fox News's top shows to lend "official" legitimacy to Fox's interpretation of the Great Recession and, importantly, its retelling of the Depression's history.¹⁴⁸ In looking at Fox News's coverage of the stimulus debate, one finds that rather than being anti-intellectual, Fox News's programs functioned more as a public platform for the conservative intelligentsia and worked as popular interfaces for the translation and mass dissemination of conservative intellectual culture.

Fox News's embrace of theoretical and historical knowledge concerning economics reflects a trend that has characterized the political right since the rise of the "Chicago Revolution" and neoclassical economic thought in the 1970s. The postwar conservative movement has produced one of the greatest ironies of modern American politics, which Fox News has been complicit in propagating. That is, it has built the movement's populist image by presenting conservative political culture as working-class culture and by presenting liberals as disconnected, educated elites. However, at the same time Republican Party was developing its populist representational strategy during the 1960s and 1970s, it was investing immense energy and resources to the build up a

¹⁴⁸ Using the Factiva database of broadcast transcripts, 2009 marks a high point for the appearance of experts and researchers from the top-five conservative think tanks on Fox News programming over a ten-year time span (accessed 12/7/2011). The early months of 2009, the months surrounding the stimulus debate and during August and September, the months of the town hall protests over the healthcare bill, stand as the highest points where experts from these top think-tanks appeared on Fox News top programs or were cited. However, hundreds of less well-known think tanks appeared on Fox News during this period as well. The top five think tanks include the Heritage Foundation (1973), Cato Institute (1977), Manhattan Institute (1984), Competitive Enterprise Institute (1984), American Enterprise Institute (1943), Hoover Institution (1919).

conservative knowledge infrastructure.¹⁴⁹ Today, the party maintains this investment and nurtures its institutional relationships with free market intellectuals in academia and in think tank research networks. Conversely, the Democratic Party lacks the same political commitment to the cultivation and deployment of party-intellectuals and the production and popularization of left-leaning economy theory. Instead, the Democratic left prefers to align its intellectual credibility with non-partisan knowledge producers (Rich 2001).¹⁵⁰ In the end, the Democratic Party may secure more votes from professors, college students, and other people in education and the academic world but Republicans seem far more adept at mobilizing ideologically committed and identifiable economic theory in mainstream politics and popular media.

The intellectual muscle of the political right's free market knowledge infrastructure and its dexterity in using this infrastructure becomes abundantly clear when one examines how Fox News's top shows integrated and deployed formal expertise and academic research in their programming during the Recession. The way Fox News programs used the scholarly works of conservative economic historians in early 2009 to officially and scientifically support their critique of the New Deal provides an especially illustrative example of the sophistication of the network's interpretative strategy during

¹⁴⁹ For work on the rise of conservative think tanks and the conservative intellectual movement see (Himmelstein, 1990, pp. 145-51; Phillips-Fein, 2009; Nash, 1998, pp. 334-341; Medvetz (forth coming); Rich, 2004).

¹⁵⁰ In his article, "The Politics of Expertise in Congress and the News Media" (2001), Andrew Rich's survey of the views members of congress have of think tanks show that Democratic congress members view think tanks that do not identify with a political ideology as most credible whereas conservative congress members held that conservative think tanks are the most credible (p. 586). This demonstrates how the congressional left is still committed to the empirical knowledge tradition and a-political, disinterested analysis, whereas their conservative counterparts are more likely to cite and support ideologically invested and self-identified knowledge producing organizations. This study also demonstrates the significant uptick of sources from conservative think tank that were called to testify in congress after the 1994 and 1995 Republican takeover (p. 592).

the stimulus debate, as well as exemplifies the interconnectedness of the Republican Party, the conservative intelligentsia, and major conservative media corporations like Fox News. In addition to having think tank researchers on as guests, Fox News's top shows regularly guided the viewers to the website of free market institutes for "more information." In one episode, Hannity tells famed conservative political strategist Karl Rove how he found all the information about the stimulus bill at the website of arguably the most influential conservative think tank, the Heritage Foundation.¹⁵¹ Hannity tells the viewer, "By the way, the website is AskHeritage.org. I got a lot of information." Backing Hannity's suggestion, Rove says, "AskHeritage.org. Yes." Hannity repeats, "AskHeritage. All right" (1/29/2009). However, the citation of conservative think tanks and the use of statistics and different pieces of data taken from them is one of the more simple aspects of how expert knowledge is used in Fox News's top programs. To really grasp the complexity of how Fox News uses formal knowledge in its framing of the recession, one must closely look at the appearance of academics and intellectuals on Fox News programs and pay particular attention to how Fox News programs treat their research and intellectual books.

In the following pages, I will conduct a close reading of a *Hannity* segment that features economic historian Amity Shlaes and her book (2007) *The Forgotten Man: a New History of the Great Depression*. I will demonstrate the manner in which the *Hannity* segment links Shlaes' free market historical argument to the collective memory of the Great Depression. In using different class-based sources of legitimacy and

¹⁵¹ By the mid-1980s, the Heritage Foundation became one of the most established and wide sweeping conservative think tanks in the U.S. George H. Nash, a preeminent scholar on conservative intellectual history, refers to it as the "nerve center of the "Reagan Revolution"" (1998, p. 335). The Heritage Foundation was deeply involved in organizing and facilitating the Tea Party movement and is one of the top think tanks that are cited on Fox News and talk radio.

knowledge to advance the same economic-historical argument, the *Hannity* program seeks to create the appearance of a new consensus about the New Deal, one seemingly shared in elite academic circles and by the commonsense thinking host, Hannity, the media proxy for the everyday viewer at home. I refer to the interplay and orchestration of populist and intellectual modes of persuasion prevalent in Fox News programming as the “populist-intellectual tactic” (PIT).

PIT involves the translation of conservative intellectual knowledge into popular knowledge and this, in turn, works to create the notion of a consensual ideological interpretation of the Depression. I will also demonstrate how the use of PIT comes with its own dangers and has the potential to undermine the working-class cultural aesthetic and populist sensibility that Fox News uses to distinguish itself from its rivals in the news industry. How can Fox’s top programs maintain their populist brand by opposing educated elites, professional class taste, and intellectual culture, while simultaneously using these same elite bases of authority to validate their interpretation of the Great Depression? In using the example of the *Hannity* segment, I will show how the inherent elitism of expert knowledge is kept at arm’s length by the use of various representational tactics. Through distancing themselves in various ways from intellectual culture, by affirming their ordinariness, and by constantly counterbalancing performances of a professional intellect with performances of a popular intellect, Fox News hosts work to manage and conceal the contradictions that arise from using different class-cultural sources of authority.

Before breaking into a close textual analysis of the *Hannity* segment, I will briefly explain the institutional dimension of the populist-intellectual tactic. Amity Shlaes, while being a key intellectual in the modern conservative movement, is not immensely, by

herself, important to Fox News. She is one among hundreds of academics and researchers that appeared on Fox News during Great Depression. Nevertheless, by just focusing on her individual career as a public intellectual and the movement of her Depression history book across different institutional sites, promotional platforms and tastes cultures, one can get a useful snap shot of the interconnections and relationships between the key ideological infrastructures of the conservative movement: the knowledge, Party, and popular media establishments.

A Tour Around the Conservative Knowledge Circuit

Amity Shlaes' intellectual resume is impressive because she and her work have crossed so many cultural fields and media platforms and intersected at one moment or the other with the major nodes for the dissemination of neoclassical economic thought. In the world of print journalism, she has been an editor and/or columnist for key sites of free market editorial opinion such as the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Financial Times*, the *National Review* and *Bloomberg News*. As professional researcher and distinguished fellow, she has directed and contributed to various academic centers and think tanks, some of which openly advocate free market policies (e.g. the Manhattan Institute, George W. Bush Institute), while others that market themselves as non-partisan (e.g. Council on Foreign Relations). Shlaes has also appeared on radio (e.g. NPR's *Marketplace*) and television (e.g. Fox News, CNBC, Bloomberg Television) for years. As evident by the warm obituary she wrote in 2006 for Milton Friedman in the *New York Sun*, Shlaes identifies herself and her work with the history of the postwar conservative intellectual movement, and her peers in the contemporary conservative intelligentsia have placed her work within the same historical tradition. In the preface of a 2004 edited

volume of essays titled *Turning Intellect into Influence* that celebrates the twenty-five year anniversary of Manhattan Institute (a top conservative think tank), Shlaes is included as part of the new generation of conservative intellectual leaders and is compared to the likes of conservative intellectual heavyweights such as Charles Murray and George Gilder.

While Shlaes has published successful economic history books in the past such as the national best seller *The Greedy Hand* (1999), *The Forgotten Man*, published in 2007, is her most successful book by far. It stayed on the *New York Times' Bestseller List* for nineteen consecutive weeks, and, at present, over 250,000 copies have been printed—an exceptional amount for a book on economic history. In addition, *The Forgotten Man* won her the 2009 Friedrich von Hayek Prize, one of the most prestigious awards in the conservative intellectual community. However, more relevant to the subject at hand is how this book's cultural value was converted into political capital when the Republican leadership and Fox News commentators began using it to systematically discredit any vestige of Keynesian economic thought in the current political arena, as well as to bolster their critiques of the stimulus bill.

As early as 2007, major republican figures began touting the importance of *The Forgotten Man*. In June of 2007, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich praised Shlaes' book for shedding light on the, pre-New Deal era of, "Whig-style free-market liberalism" that Gingrich suggested the nation should return to (Weigel, 2009, para. 10). Yet, it was during the fall of 2008 and, especially during the 2009 stimulus debate, that large numbers of Republican politicians began to reference her book.¹⁵² In September

¹⁵² The fact that the book received little fan fair when it was actually published and only gained widespread visibility when the economic crisis advanced and when the Democrats took control of

2008 Senator John Kyl, the Republican whip, referenced Shlaes' book on the floor of the Senate to denounce comparisons that were being made between George W. Bush and Herbert Hoover. He said, "In the excellent history of the Great Depression by Amity Shlaes, *The Forgotten Man*, we are reminded that Hoover was an interventionist...a strong critic of markets." In a December 2008 interview with a local reporter, Indiana Representative, and Tea Party favorite, Mike Pence argued against the growing political consensus that massive stimulus was needed by paraphrasing the argument Shlaes puts forth in the *The Forgotten Man*. "Shlaes," Pence said to the reporter, "points out [that]...it was the spending and taxing policies of 1932 and 1936 that exacerbated the situation...That's why I say it's important for the Congress to act, but one of the lessons of the 1930s is we can't borrow and spend back to a growing economy" (Weigel, 2009, para. 14).

As the stimulus debate really began to take hold in the early months of 2009, the number of Republicans referencing Shlaes' book dramatically increased and became more emphatic. In February 2009, during the confirmation hearing of Energy Secretary Steven Chu, Republican Senator John Barrasso lifted up a copy of Shlaes' book and presented it to the committee and the press in attendance. He told the audience, "In these economic times, a number of members of the Senate are reading a book called *The Forgotten Man*, about the history of the Great Depression, as we compare and look for solutions, as we look at a stimulus package" (Chait, 2009, para. 3). In early 2009 especially, Shlaes' book was being praised and used as talking points by top-ranking Republicans. In a February 3, 2009 article in a *Washington Independent* article "The

the presidency speaks to the way in which the politicization of expert knowledge and intellectual culture is contingent on the historical moment and not inherent in the intellectual work itself.

GOP's Anti-Stimulus Manifesto," discusses how Paul Ryan, the ranking Representative on the House Budget Committee, and Senator John Ensign, the head of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, were recommending and distributing copies of Shlaes's *Forgotten Man* among colleagues. According to an April 2009 article by *Politico* titled, "Why GOP is Devouring One Book," House Republicans were, "tearing through the pages of Amity Shlaes' *Forgotten Man* like soccer moms before book club night" (Coller and O'Connor, 2009). The article goes on to say that in the first months of 2009, Mike Ference, the policy aide of Republican House Minority Whip Eric Cantor, invited Shlaes to join a group of twenty or so other House Republicans for lunch at a Capitol suite (Chait, 2009)¹⁵³

Paralleling the promotion the book received among congressional Republicans on Capitol Hill, Shlaes and her book were significantly featured in Fox News programming during the same time period. From August 2008 to April 2009, Shlaes' book was cited by Fox News on numerous occasions across various programs. In the fall of 2008, however, Shlaes only appeared on the lower rated daytime programs.¹⁵⁴ However, from late-January to April 2009, the same time the promotion of her book spiked among Republican congress people, Shlaes and her book are recommended and/or are given full segments on Fox News's top-rated and primetime programs. On all

¹⁵³ According to a *Politico* article, in April 2009, during a press conference about the stimulus bill, Alabama Representative Spencer Bachus even references William Graham Sumner's definition of the forgotten man, Sumner being the late-nineteenth-century intellectual Shlaes quotes in the epigraph of her book. He says, quoting Sumner directly, "He works; he votes; generally, he prays—but he always pays." Bachus continues, "Now, the forgotten man today is the taxpayer...It's discussed and it's decided that we are going to help this individual or cooperation out, we propose a law, and guess what, it's the forgotten man today who always pays for someone else's mistake. He pays his mortgage on time, but he has to pay someone else's mortgage" (Coller and O'Connor, 2009).

¹⁵⁴ Such as the *Journal Editorial Report* (10/11/2008) and *America's News Headquarters* (11/13/2008, 12/1/2008) and on *Cavuto*, a program on Fox News's sister network the Fox Business Network (8/21/2008)

three of Fox News's top programs, a host or a guest recommended Shlaes' book. In the episode of *Glenn Beck*, guest, Mark Sanford, the Republican governor of South Carolina, tells Beck, "a lot of the same things that are being pulled out of the pages right now [policies] were played in the 1920s and 1930s and they did not work. We're talking about going down a road that is going to prolong, exacerbate and deepen the crisis that we're in." Closing out the segment, Beck tells Sanford, "Governor, thank you very much," then inserts, "By the way, if you have not read Amity Shlaes' book, *The Forgotten Man*...have you read that Governor?" Sanford responds, "I have read it, fabulous. I highly recommend it" (2/2/2009).¹⁵⁵ On an April 15, 2009 episode of *The Factor*—the day of the national Tea Party protest occurred—comedian Dennis Miller frames the Tea Party protest through Shlaes' book. Explaining the theory Shlaes takes from William Graham Sumner (which I will explain in further detail shortly), he tells O'Reilly, "I'm reading an interesting book now by a woman named Amity Shlaes. It's a great book about the forgotten America and about the Great Depression. And she cites this Yale professor in 1883 in her forward notes. And the speech he gives, the essence being "A" discerns a problem with "X." "A" consults "B" and figures out how they can help "X." "A" and "B" tell "C" what he's going to give "X." And today was a "sea" change [playing on the word "sea"]. I think "C," [the Tea Party protester] the forgotten man, as per Shlaes' book, has just had enough."

¹⁵⁵ In the *Hannity* episode, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani says to Hannity, "I hope he [president Obama] and his people have read *The Forgotten Man*, Amity Shlaes' book that came out last year. I think it's back on the best-seller list. Basically it points out why the recession of 1929, which was a bad one, became the Great Depression of eleven or twelve years...the actions of the New Deal...did not work from the point of view of solving the Depression" (1/26/2009).

Translating Intellectual Culture into Popular Culture

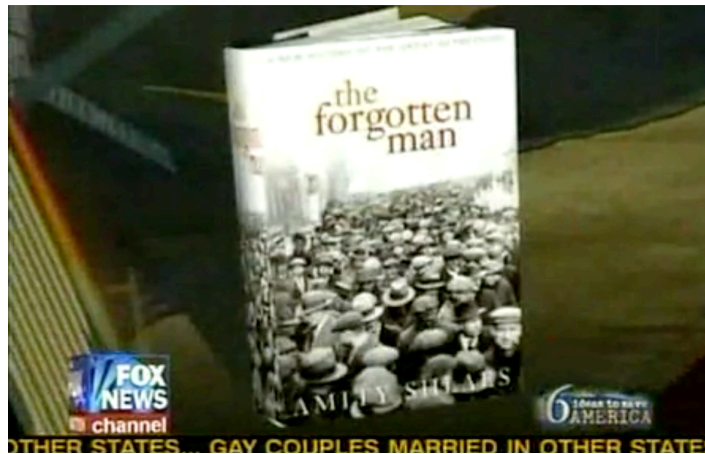


Image 4.1: *Hannity* promoting Shlaes' book

Beyond mere citation, in the following section I will discuss the more in depth ways in which Fox News engaged and presented Shlaes' book. Only a week after Beck's first episode aired on Fox News on January 19, 2009, Beck had Shlaes come on his show to promote and explain her book's argument. Shlaes would appear on Beck's program multiple times in the months and years ahead as well. Before Beck even had a show on Fox News, he featured Amity Shlaes as a guest and promoted her book on his primetime program on CNN Headline News back in June of 2008. Thus, Beck was one of the first major conservative radio and television personalities to recognize and avidly support Shlaes' work. Yet, Beck's early promotion of Shlaes reflects a more general quality of Beck's programming style. The unique program format Beck brought to Fox News was characterized by a stronger emphasis on popular education, a commitment to the popularization of conservative scholarship, and, resembling the stylistic qualities of radio (his career base), a more free flowing and less rushed program format that was more conducive to historical and academic arguments. While Beck's programming style

was unconventional in more ways than I've outlined here, his newly launched program on Fox was immediately successful and lifted, almost single handily, the ratings of Fox News's daytime programming block to unprecedented levels.¹⁵⁶ Beck's rapid ascendancy to become one of Fox News's top three shows, and doing it in an unfavorable five o'clock time slot no less, was, I would surmise, partly responsible for the greater emphasis on historical content and academic work in Fox News's other top shows during the Recession.¹⁵⁷

Yet, because Beck's program was so new and unconventional in relation to *Hannity* and *The O'Reilly Factor*, Fox News's long established, flagship programs, it is problematic to use Beck's program as a representative example of how Fox News's top programs used experts and intellectual culture to reinterpret the Depression. This is especially true when one compares the significant difference between Beck's programming style to *The O'Reilly Factor*, Fox News's signature, number one program. O'Reilly started his career at the tabloid television show *Inside Edition* and as such his style is far more compatible with the rapid, sound-bite-oriented pace of television news. Moreover, O'Reilly's program remains true to the "cable magazine" format by the way it transitions between segments that have clear, recognizable boundaries (e.g. traditional newscast, documentary, interview, roundtable discussion, light-hearted segment on pop

¹⁵⁶ As the Pew study (2010a) report states, "Glenn Beck's average of 2.32 million viewers in 2009—up 96% from the previous year in that slot—was high especially given his 5 p.m. time slot. Beck's program popularity was a key reason for Fox's ratings surge in daytime over all.

¹⁵⁷ Another factor to consider is that the audience of Fox News already identified with and enjoyed historical programming. Therefore, the historical-education emphasis of Beck's program was simply tapping a preference amongst the audience that had already been there. According to a YouGov's Brandindex survey conducted in 2010 that compared which top five brands Republicans and Democrats most identify with, Fox News was cited as the number one brand that Republicans identified with but the second brand Republicans most identified with was the History Channel. See (Ives, 2010).

culture and celebrity gossip).¹⁵⁸ This is not to say O'Reilly's program did not significantly engage the issue of the Depression, promote books or turn to experts and academics in framing the crisis. However, I am arguing that his show did lack the same emphasis on and deep engagement with intellectual works that Beck's show exhibited. During the recession, *The O'Reilly Factor* has displayed the same general use of expert knowledge and the same sophisticated balance of populist and professional personalities and voices that one sees on *Glenn Beck* and *Hannity*. By frequently identifying himself as both a "blue-collar guy" and a historian and author, in a way O'Reilly's on camera persona embodies the populist-intellectual tactic itself. Nevertheless, of the top three programs, *The Factor* had the least amount of historical content, documentaries, and academic guests in 2009.

Hosting a Fox News program since 1999, Sean Hannity was well familiar with the Fox News's formula by the time the Recession hit in 2008 and his program, like O'Reilly's, primarily adhered to the cable magazine format during the crisis. However, Hannity was clearly influenced by Beck and the broader trend toward historical debate in the political arena. Like Beck, Hannity's program aired short, historical documentaries about the Depression and devoted segments to not just the topic of the Depression but

¹⁵⁸ I take the term "cable magazine" from Chris Peters. In his article *No Spin Zones* (2010), Peters defines cable magazine this way, he writes, "'cable magazine' suggests an affinity with news magazine such as *60 Minutes* which have been around for decades; quasi-investigative journalism, typically an hour in length, that consider events in greater detail than the network newscasts. These shows also have a semblance of Sunday-Morning talk shows, like *Meet the Press*, with prominent political interviewees and roundtable discussions. A hint of the traditional newscast is found in these broadcasts with reports that are virtually indiscernible from stories that would be filed on the CBS Evening News. Political debate shows like *Crossfire* lend their embrace of conflict and volume. There is an occasional flavor of tabloid news magazines such as *A Current Affair*; salacious stories of sex, celebrity, and crime. A more accurate description might be "cable political talk show news magazine", but this noun-train is an awkward construction. As such, I have conceptualized them quite literally as the print news magazine adapted by the cable networks; short briefs, longer social stories, interviews, and opinion pieces brought together in a consistent format" (2010, pp. 846-847, fn 1).

to academic works *about* the Depression. In an April 7, 2009 episode, Hannity devoted an entire segment to Shlaes' book *The Forgotten Man*. This one segment is a particularly suitable example of how Fox News's top shows deploy expert knowledge and intellectual culture in that it represents a middle ground between Beck's program's eccentricity and O'Reilly's conventionalism. Furthermore, taking place at the tail end of the stimulus debate and at the eve of the Tea Party movement, Hannity's segment on "the forgotten man" nicely crystalizes the central argument about the Depression that had been developed in numerous segments and programs in the months prior.

In the interview portion of the April 7, 2009 "forgotten man" segment, Hannity has Amity Shlaes on as a guest to promote her book and to discuss the history of the Great Depression. Addressing Shlaes across the anchor desk, Hannity summarizes Shlaes book, "you tell the story of A, the progressive of the 1920s and 1930s whose good intentions, supposedly, inspired the New Deal, and the story of C, the American who paid for it, and was not thought of." Looking for Shlaes's affirmation, Hannity goes on to connect the book's argument to the present context: "this is where we are today...for example, in New York City, we have nine million people, and 42,242 of those people pay fifty percent of the tax bill. Is that C?" Shlaes' responds stating, "that's the C of New York, yes, and we have C's all across the country. Maybe the person who doesn't get the mortgage break who was paying his mortgage before...or the person who doesn't fall into one of those groups that gets favored by one of the bailouts. That's one of the concerns. You always leave someone out, that forgotten man." What is most striking in this exchange is how Shlaes and Hannity reappropriate the Depression era forgotten man trope to advance a critique of the New Deal and contemporary progressive policies. When president Franklin Roosevelt used the term in the 1930s, he was describing those

exploited “at the bottom of the economic pyramid.” In stark contrast, Shlaes and Hannity use the same term to describe those “not thought of” at the top of the tax code. Modeled after Shlaes’ book, Hannity’s “forgotten man” segment seeks to change the meaning of the forgotten man trope in order to use it to redefine the historical protagonist of the Depression and Depression itself. But how is such a leap of interpretation achieved?

The letter scheme Shlaes and Hannity use to describe different economic actors (A, B, C), is a reference to the social theory of a nineteenth-century intellectual and laissez-faire advocate named William Graham Sumner.¹⁵⁹ It was Sumner who first coined the term in his 1883 essay “The Forgotten Man,” and his work is resurrected to give the forgotten man trope a conservative accent and antistatist ideological positionality.¹⁶⁰ While Hannity’s use of the forgotten man trope more closely echoes Sumner’s definition of the term, in this episode Hannity, nevertheless, highlights the forgotten man of FDR’s famous speech since it is the historical reference most popularly associated with the term.¹⁶¹ Invoking FDR’s definition poses a potential risk to Shlaes

¹⁵⁹ William Graham Sumner was one of most prominent intellectuals of the Gilded Age. Like other classical liberals in his day, Sumner opposed the Spanish-American War and U.S. military intervention in general on the grounds that he saw unnecessary wars as devices for funneling tax payer money into the hands of war-profiteering plutocrats. More than his anti-imperialist politics, however, he was known for being the most influential social Darwinist of his era. Financially backed by its most ardent supporters in the business community such as John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie, social Darwinism was the first pseudo-science to be mass-marketed and mass-published. Sumner stood at the center of this science functioning, as Susan Jacoby states, as a “prototypical public intellectual” (2008, p. 61). Viewing the poor as the detritus of human evolution and millionaires as a “super biological species,” Sumner’s work synthesized laissez-faire political economic theory with Darwinistic sociological discourse. In the *Hannity* segment, however, only Sumner’s laissez-faire economic arguments are emphasized. While they are present as subtext, Sumner’s association with social Darwinism is explicitly avoided by Hannity.

¹⁶⁰ When Sumner wrote his 1883 “Forgotten Man” essay, the idea of welfare and a positive state was just beginning to take shape. Some of the first forms of welfare emerged in the 1880s when social reformers mobilized voters to establish pension and social insurance programs for industrial workers and the needy. Criticizing the “social speculators” and “reformers” in the essay itself, Sumner’s 1883 “Forgotten Man” argument can be seen as a rebuttal to the infant but increasingly influential ideology of social reform he saw crystallizing around him.

¹⁶¹ After Roosevelt’s pivotal “forgotten man” radio address in Albany, New York 1932, the

and Hannity's free market interpretation, because of the proletarian and laborist political connotations it carries. To make the term ideologically useful, Hannity's "forgotten man" segment follows Shlaes' book and rewrites FDR's definition of the forgotten man by reading it through and overlaying it with Sumner's laissez-faire social theory. In doing so, the segment, like the book, seeks to simultaneously obscure the moral claim underlying FDR's definition of the forgotten man and discredit the left's claim to the trope and, by extension, the history of the Depression.

Hannity "forgotten man" segment replicates the historical sources, the main theory, and basic rhetorical framework of Shlaes' book. However, as a popular television program *Hannity* engages the topic of the Depression and represents the conservative forgotten man in ways that are unavailable and/or culturally undesirable to Shlaes. When projected through the popular visual aesthetic of the *Hannity* program, when framed through Sean Hannity's populist and moral discourses, and when mediated through his performance as a non-expert, i.e. as a lay student of history, Shlaes' book's argument, evidence, and theories are given popular overtones. In other words, the Hannity program attempts to endow her historical revision of the Great Depression with an immediate relevance, popular authority and working-class cultural appeal it may not

forgotten man trope not only spread in the political culture of the 1930s but was manifest in popular culture as well appearing in the era's most popular movies and songs. For example, the song "Remember My Forgotten Man" from Al Dubin and Harry Warren's *Gold Digger* series of Hollywood films was one of the most popular songs of the 1930s. This song was a direct reference to FDR's speech and played on a similar theme about unrewarded labor as evident in the lyrics: "Remember my forgotten man, You had him cultivate the land; He walked behind the plow, The sweat fell from his brow, But look at him right now!" Interestingly, Shlaes and Fox News's reintroduction of the term in the late-2000s was not the first time a major conservative political figure or organization attempted to use the term and reinterpret it in a conservative light. As Garry Wills (1970) documents in his biography of Richard Nixon, Nixon used the term "forgotten Americans" in his speech at the 1968 Republican convention in Miami as a sort of precursor to his more famous term "silent majority." Nixon took this term from the 1964 Barry Goldwater campaign where Goldwater's speech writer Michael Bernstein would use the term "forgotten American" (pp. 310, fn 37, 38).

have otherwise.

To understand how the *Hannity* segment adapts the intellectual content of Shlaes' book to the television format and the popular aesthetic of the program, I will first look at how the "forgotten man" segment is set up earlier in the program during a preview. I will follow this with an analysis of the introduction portion of the "forgotten man" segment. Lastly, I will analyze the main body of the segment where Hannity interviews Shlaes. In the preview to the "forgotten man" segment, Hannity tells the audience, "it is the anniversary of FDR's famous "forgotten man" address. But liberals have forgotten who the forgotten man *really* is. A very important history lesson that we all need to remember." As Hannity says this, the viewer is shown a window with the famous black and white footage of Roosevelt signing the Social Security Act; underneath a title reads "HISTORY LESSON." Placed next to this "history lesson" preview is a video window previewing another segment on the program line up. It shows footage of Democratic Senator Barney Frank speaking at a podium. Underneath the video window a title reads "FRANK GETS SCHOOLED." Hannity tells the viewer, "Barney Frank *goes face to face* with a very sharp college student on the issue of the economy and let's just say the congressman...doesn't keep his cool." Standing in contrast to the high-minded appeal of the history segment previewed next to it, this segment appeals to the viewer's desire to witness partisan combat and an emotional outburst. Placed together, these previews demonstrate how a given episode of *Hannity* encompasses and balances different kinds of tastes and cultural appeals serving in one moment of the show an aspirational desire for enlightenment and in another moment a "lower" desire to see a political enemy embarrassed and defeated. Placing these previews together also points to the way the *Hannity* program brings together different kinds of tastes and cultural

appeals and rationalizes their connection. For example, gaining knowledge from an enlightening segment offers the viewer argumentative ammo to “school” someone themselves in a political debate/confrontation that they may have on online, at work, at a rally or at Thanksgiving with one’s brother or uncle.

Back from the commercial break, the introductory portion of the “forgotten man” segment begins by comparing two historic quotes against each other; one is from Franklin Roosevelt and the other from Sumner. The first quote comes in the form of a cracking recording of Roosevelt’s voice. The audio clip replays the most famous lines from Roosevelt’s 1932 “forgotten man” radio address: “These unhappy times call for the building up of plans that rest upon the forgotten, the unorganized, but the indispensable unit of economic power, for plans like those of 1917 that build from the bottom up and not from the top down, that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid.” Cued with this recording, an image of an antique radio is shown on screen and is layered by text that follows the quote (see image 4.2). The second quote, which I will detail shortly, is spoken by Hannity and recites Sumner’s basic argument in his “Forgotten Man” essay.

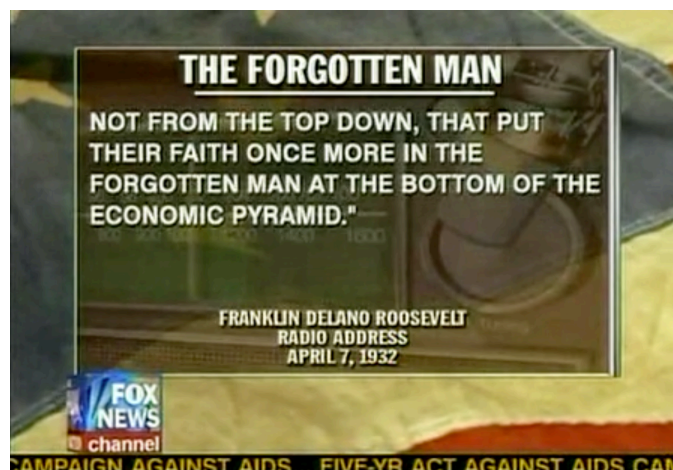


Image 4.2: visual aid to Roosevelt audio

In beginning the segment this way, Hannity replicates the same juxtaposition of quotes that Shlaes' highlights in the foreword of her book. Mimicking Shlaes' layout of her book, the presentation of these quotes nicely introduces the rhetorical parameters of the book, its key concepts, and core ideological positions. Additionally, these quotes are useful because they meet the needs of the fast-paced production style of television news, condensing the book's two competing political definitions of the forgotten man into useable sound bites. Hannity's partisan framing in the preview ("but the liberals have forgotten who the forgotten man really is") coupled with these two thirty-second quotes set up a basic argument structure for the remaining bulk of the segment.

Summarizing a four hundred page book into a seven-minute segment obviously has its limitations such as oversimplifying a complex argument. However, it has advantages as well. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is especially through electronic forms of mass media that Roosevelt, and by extension the Depression, is remembered in the national collective memory. As a television program, *Hannity* can represent the book's interpretation of the Depression's history on communicative registers (e.g. audio, film) that speak to the collective memory of the Depression in a way Shales' book, in its printed form, cannot. The audio clip and the image of the antique radio invokes Roosevelt's "fireside chats," the monthly radio addresses that have been credited for endearing millions of Americans to FDR and that still symbolize his personable presidential style. Like the crackling sonic quality of the radio recording, the film shown of FDR signing the Social Security Act in the preview bears the mark of its time period. Its black and white color, its scratches, grain particles, the flickering image are all things that characterize old film stock and it is these characteristics that help the viewer situate the historical moment of the Great Depression. From an entertainment

standpoint, these media artifacts, like a teaser scene in a movie, draw the viewer into the segment and serve to maintain the viewer's attention during the drier, policy discussion that follows. From a political-ideological standpoint, using these artifacts and icons enables the *Hannity* program to place the viewer's more *general* and popular understanding of the Great Depression in dialogue with Shlaes' *particular*, intellectual retelling of the event. Engaging the collective memory of the Depression first is especially important when considering that the heart of Shlaes and Hannity's reinterpretation of the Depression relies on the theory of a relatively obscure conservative intellectual in William Graham Sumner.

Having primed the viewer with familiar representations of the Depression, the segment transitions and introduces the second quote. Hannity informs the viewer that, "FDR took the idea of the "Forgotten Man" from Yale professor William Graham Sumner who wrote about the "Forgotten Man" half a century earlier." Hannity continues and begins to paraphrase Sumner's argument:

Now Sumner described two people, A and B, who realized that a third person, X, is suffering in some way, and decide that X needs federal assistance. A and B, however, can't pay for that assistance on their own, so they need to raise taxes on C. The forgotten man is roped in to pay for the various programs that A and B deem necessary, and FDR, however, claimed that X was the forgotten man, all designed, you know [getting tripped up on the awkward letter scheme], to bring up these federal interventions aimed at helping X, all at the expense of C who is the *original* forgotten man. Sound familiar?

As Hannity explains Sumner's theory, a colorful diagram appears on the screen showing cartoon figures, money, arrows, designating letters, and the smiling faces of Democratic senate leader Harry Reid and president Barack Obama (see image 4.3).



Image 4.3: visualizing Sumner's forgotten man theory

Hannity's verbal articulation of Sumner's forgotten man argument provides the basic story of government theft and taxpayer victimization that underlies Shlaes' reinterpretation of the New Deal and Fox News's coverage of the recession. But by itself, Sumner's letter-scheme-oriented argument comes across as overly abstract and vague. However, the visual diagram that accompanies Hannity's verbal summary of Sumner's argument works to flesh out this schema by assigning social and political identities to each letter and figure. "C", the figure at the center of the visual diagram, is depicted as a forward looking entrepreneur who stands at the origin of the money stream, as indicated by the arrows, and is thus presented as the sole wealth generator and producer in the cast of characters.¹⁶² The virtue and patriotism of "C" is reinforced

¹⁶² Sumner's argument against taxation and welfare in his 1883 "Forgotten Man" essay is fundamentally grounded on the moral principles of producerism. In his essay, Sumner distills the producer republican tenet of property and wealth entitlement nicely stating, "man's right to take power and wealth out of the social product is measured by the energy and wisdom which he has contributed to the social effort." However, Sumner's description of the forgotten man does not stress entrepreneurialism the same way that Shlaes and Fox News's top show's appropriation of the term does. Sumner described the forgotten man as the "self-supporting," "honest laborer" who doesn't receive public aid and "asks no favors" and even suggested that he was closer to the poor in economic standing than the rich. However, other themes of Sumner's forgotten man narrative are strikingly similar to Shlaes and Fox News's forgotten man narrative. Like Fox News's top shows, Sumner's variant of producerism is rigidly anti-statist in almost every instance

and signaled by the awkwardly photo shopped American flag on his shoulder. Presenting “A” and “B” with the faces of Obama and Reid, ties these letters to government and the system of taxation in generally but specifically to the Democratic opposition. By situating Sumner’s esoteric and century-old theory within the preexisting partisan meaning structure of the *Hannity* program and by using it to interpret current policy (e.g. the stimulus act), Sumner’s work is endowed with more immediate importance and is made to, as Hannity suggests, “Sound familiar.”

In his verbal explanation of Sumner, Hannity inserts FDR’s definition of the forgotten man into Sumner’s schema (“FDR...claimed that X was the forgotten man”) and thereby presents the schema, following Shlaes’ book, as a way to reinterpret the history of the New Deal. In the visual diagram, figure X receives government assistance and addresses the audience with his hands out. In this way, Hannity reframes the leftist vision of the forgotten man as a parasitic character and this stands in direct contrast to the producerist image that FDR expresses in the quote played moments prior. In the audio clip, FDR also defines the forgotten man by wealth creation and productive labor (“indispensable units of economic power”) and explains this figure’s victimization as one

isolating government interference in the market as being the primary cause of distributive injustice.

Through the U.S. tax system, he argues, the government offsets the “natural” distribution of wealth in the national economy by transferring wealth from the producers to the non-producers. Sumner writes, “If we have state regulation [defined here as public services], what is always forgotten is this: Who pays for it? Who is the victim of it?” (2007, p. 482). Because he believes “government produces nothing at all” and because you cannot “tax people who produce nothing and save nothing” (i.e. the poor), the cost of government programs unjustly fall on the shoulders of a third party, the Forgotten Man. According to Sumner, redistributive measures taken up by the state are harmful to the national interest regardless if they serve an altruistic purpose by helping the poor or a sinister one functioning to doll out government contracts and secure a system of spoils and sinecures enjoyed by government administrators and politicians. *All* redistributive policies, Sumner argues in his essay, are against the public interest because they inexorably diminish growth and prosperity by encumbering the economic activity of the independent laborer. The “productive force” of this man, the Forgotten Man, is wasted, which, by extension, wastes the productive force of the “whole society.”

of unrecognized and unrewarded labor, what can be taken to mean, as explained in the introduction, theft at the hands of greedy capitalists. When framed by FDR's proletariat, laborist brand of producerism, the interventionist policies of the New Deal serve the forgotten man not by giving him charity but by correcting the lopsided, "top down" economic structure that denies wage workers the wealth and resources that their labor *rightfully* entitles them to. However, Hannity's analysis of the FDR broadcast only discusses how New Deal rhetoric like the "forgotten man" speech called for more progressive taxation and government programs, thereby obscuring and the producerist moral argument that FDR used to justify these policy positions.

What is most significant about the introductory portion of this segment is how the *Hannity* program translates the main historical argument and political message of Shlaes' intellectual book into popular discourse and "good" television. However, this intellectual-to-popular translation is not without its risks, since the academic content of the program might threaten the program's working-class aesthetic and Hannity's performance as a culturally ordinary guy whose taste and knowledge are like his viewer's. For example, the algebraic language of Sumner's argument, his status as a "Yale professor," and the pedagogical role Hannity assumes ("history lesson") in explaining Sumner's theory all convey an air of cultural "specialness" and social distinction. To maintain the populist sensibility of the show and prevent a "social break" between Hannity and the everyday viewer, Hannity and the program deploy various representational techniques to downplay and mask the program's use of intellectual culture and formal expertise.

Policing the Elitism of Intellectual Content

Returning to the way Sumner's theory was visualized in the diagram above (see image 4.3), one might ask why one of the most profitable news networks in the U.S. would, with all the high-tech video effects and animation technologies at their disposal, represent such serious content and such an important historical argument in a seemingly shoddy and childish manner. The cartoon images of the businessmen could very well have been cut and pasted from a children's coloring book, while the tilted smiling heads of Barack Obama and Harry Reid resemble bobble-head dolls one finds on a car dashboard or at sports event. The rudimentary and silly nature of the visuals could be read as a conscious effort by *Hannity's* producers to appeal to the audience by "dumbing down" their programming. Such a reading would be in line with a typical critique often waged against Fox News and modern television news more generally.¹⁶³ However, this kind of reading of the representational work at play in the diagram fails to explain an important aspect of the segment. If *Hannity's* strategy was to simply sell eyeballs and offer diluted "common denominator" entertainment, why would the program take as its object of presentation the scholarly work of a modern academic and a widely unknown intellectual from the nineteenth-century?

Borrowing from veteran anchor Dan Rather, one can say that the visual diagram

¹⁶³ By the early 1990s veteran anchors and journalist increasingly voiced their concerns about the rise cable networks like Fox News. They saw the Fox News Channel as emblematic of a broader shift that was taking place in the field of broadcast journalism, a shift characterized by a rapid move away from the culture of professionalism toward a flashy, infotainment style of broadcasting. Attacking what he called the "populist" trend, long-time anchor John Chancellor warned an audience of journalists at the Fiftieth Annual Du Pont Columbia Awards forum about the grave dangers it posed and maintained that modern news networks were, in the name of greater profits, reducing "the dialogue to the lowest common denominator." Dan Rather, the embodiment of the no-nonsense, "just-the-facts" sensibility of a by-gone era of journalism, also criticized this trend calling it the "showbizification" (and by inference vulgarization) of the Fourth estate. See (Rich, 1993, p. 8; Viles, 1993, p. 12). These references were found in Joseph Caldwell's book *Televisuality* (1995, p. 341).

undoubtedly works to “showbiznify” Shlaes’ historical argument. However, I argue that the purpose of layering the argument with burlesque visual representations is as much an ideological tactic to maintain the working-class voice and authority of the show as it is a commercially motivated accommodation to mass consumerism and infotainment. For Shlaes’ intellectual work and argument to successfully operate within the populist representational strategy of the *Hannity* program, its veneer of prestige and distinction must be, to a degree, ‘unofficialized’ and brought down to earth. In short, the tactical purpose of the program’s flippant, humorous aesthetic allows the *Hannity* program to cover (and validate) Shlaes’ intellectual work without coming across as being a particularly intellectual program.

A yet further indicator of how the *Hannity* program tempers and polices the intellectual quality of Shlaes and Sumner’s work becomes evident in host, Sean Hannity’s next distancing performance. In the last couple lines of Sumner’s argument, Hannity’s facial expression seem to suggest that he recognizes how tangled and abstract Sumner’s letter-schemed model might sound to the viewer. In order to distance himself from Sumner’s language and the pedagogical role attached to it, Hannity deprecates his authority and the educational pretensions that the program exhibited in summarizing an intellectual theory. Furrowing his eyebrows but smiling, Hannity parodies the stern face of a teacher and says to the viewer, “And by the way, we’ll have a test on that coming up in five minutes.”¹⁶⁴ The viewer hears a cameraman laugh off

¹⁶⁴ These types of distancing practices are used by all three of Fox News’s top hosts in their programs. Often, they come in the form of mocking but have other forms as well. For example, in one episode of *Glenn Beck*, Beck introduces an economist who, he says, “you probably never heard of because he’s been practically erased from the history books. He was a Russian. His name was Nikolai Kondratiev. He is credited with popularizing—it’s so popular with the people I hang out with—the wave theory on capitalism” (2/24/2010). Here, one sees in Beck’s digression when he sarcastically says, “it’s so popular with the people I hang out with” how he distances the

screen. In the next line, he goes on to introduce Amity Shlaes and her book.

Playing Different Roles: Invested vs. Disinvested Analysts and the Partnered Execution of the Populist-intellectual Tactic

A close analysis of this introductory portion of the segment clearly shows how the populist-intellectual tactic operates between the intellectual content of the segment, the rhetoric of the host, and the program's visuals. However, with the entrance of historian Amity Shlaes and the commencement of the interview portion of the segment one sees how PIT is executed through the interaction of the Sean Hannity and Amity Shlaes, who, in the discussion, play different class-cultural roles. If one uses a traditional mode of rhetorical analysis to dissect their conversation, one finds they both rely on Sumner's antistatist conception of the forgotten man and they both use the same basic argument about how the New Deal's interventionist policies prolonged the Depression and how free market policies would've created a quicker recovery. But if one brackets the analysis of the political message of the segment (i.e. the New Deal didn't work) and one solely looks at the way in which these speakers *express* this message and the strategies they use to legitimate their claims about the Depression, one begins to see significant

type of intellectual content he is presenting from the social circles and culture he is a part of. Before going into his explanation of Kondratiev's wave theory, Beck says, "hang on, I need my pipe." As he explains the theory, he puts a wooden pipe in his mouth as to mock a cliché image of a professor. As well, as he explains Kondratiev's theory, Beck impersonates the voice of a stereotypical WASP or robber baron from the early twentieth century or, more accurately, Beck's impersonation of a professor shares a striking resemblance with the voice of Thurston Howell, the III, the billionaire character on *Gilligan's Island*.

In an episode of *The O'Reilly Factor*, one sees how O'Reilly performs a similar distancing practice from intellectual culture in order to maintain his working-class cultural identity. When guest John Stossel references conservative economist Friedrich Hayek in the middle of their conversation, O'Reilly interrupts him saying, "Hayek?" Stossel clarifies, "Friedrich Hayek, the economist." Still expressing his ignorance of Hayek, O'Reilly asks again, "Hayek?" The conversation moves on to a debate about whether Stossel thinks Obama is a socialist. Stossel says, "I call him an interventionist." O'Reilly responds, "nobody knows what that means...And nobody knows Hayek" (5/4/2010). By claiming ignorance of certain intellectuals and intellectual jargon, O'Reilly aligns himself with a popular intellect.

class-cultural differences between Shlaes and Hannity's communicative styles.

Midway through the interview Shlaes and Hannity get to the heart of the discussion. Hannity tells Shlaes, "There is a myth or a concept, and I think Barack Obama's trying to duplicate this, that the New Deal literally got us out of the Depression. Now, my father and mother grew up during the Depression. All right? Very tough times, and they describe them to me often, but the reality is the New Deal did not get us out of the Depression, did it?" Shlaes responds, "that's right, and the data say it, it's not hard. The Dow never came back, unemployment never got down really below ten percent, maybe one year if you're charitable...GDP per capita not back in real terms either. All the basic numbers don't look good for that period."

By mentioning how his parents "grew up during the Depression" and then following this statement with "All right?," Hannity affirms the value of a lived memory of the Depression and in doing so reframes the cultural criteria of what it means to "know" something about its history. More than just citing his parent's experience, Hannity stresses his familiarity with it by telling Shlaes how his parents, "describe them [the hard times of the Depression] to me often." He elongates the word "often," raises his eyebrows, and smirks suggesting a relationship with his parents that is so close it is endearingly burdensome. Hannity offers no logic for how his parents' experience of the "hard times" of the Depression supports his following suggestion that the New Deal didn't work. However, in stressing his closeness to his parents and their past Hannity seeks to establish not necessarily the truth of his argument but the right to speak on the topic. When Shlaes' appears on the program, a banner on the screen indicates her academic credentials reading "Amity Shlaes: Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations." In the face of this Great Depression expert, one sees how Hannity counters Shlaes'

formal expertise with a different type of authority. By basing his claim on knowledge gained through his interpersonal relationships and lived experience, Hannity's authority over the issue is established by presenting himself as the cultural bearer of his parents' generation and the legacy of the Depression. Instead of credential or professional research skills, Hannity's authority is expressed through highlighting his personal and political investment in the topic and the social relationships that inform his opinion about it.¹⁶⁵

While Hannity stresses and emphasizes the personal and social ties he has to the history of the Depression, Shlaes' strategy of legitimation exhibits the exact opposite tendency. Shlaes does not share a similar biographical story or draw a common thread between her background and Hannity's, as guest performing a more popular cultural disposition might do. Instead, as a professional historian and good social scientist, she affirms the "truth" of the New Deal's failure by citing empirical evidence. "And the data say it," she asserts immediately after Hannity shares his anecdote about his parents. Shlaes goes on to list a series of statistical indices from the era (e.g. unemployment, the Dow, GDP), which she maintains proves the ineffectiveness of the New Deal. At this juncture, one sees how the "forgotten man" segment counters the established history of the Depression with professional modes of analysis. The presence of Shlaes and her ability to display a comfortable mastery with Depression era economic statistics give

¹⁶⁵ Hannity turns to the same sources of knowledge and takes a similar personally invested analytical approach when the discussion shifts to contemporary tax policy later in the interview. Hannity tells Shlaes how higher taxes are driving talented entrepreneurs out of particular states and potentially out of the country. Hannity tells Shlaes, "I know a lot of other people that are *successful* and they say, you know what, I'll go to Florida. They don't have a state income tax...are we risking the fundamentals of a society, literally deteriorating, because we already have this redistribution wealth system?" Shlaes responds again, not with her own personal anecdote, but with a quote from FDR about the "capital strike," in other words, with an impersonal piece of historical information.

Hannity's interpretation of the New Deal the appearance of being in line with the empirical reality of the past or what television scholar John McArthur calls "the authority of the Real" (1978, p. 28). Having the best handle of the tools and methods of social science, professional historians can claim to have a special access to what, in a material, phenomenal sense, *really* happened in history.¹⁶⁶ Functioning as a symbol of scientific expertise, Shlaes' argument about the New Deal and the Depression bears the quality of both exactitude and universal credibility. This stands in stark contrast to the more open-ended quality of collective memory and the more idiosyncratic character of personal histories like the one Hannity cites. However, the truth-value of the empirical evidence Shlaes uses to support her argument is contingent on her ability to present her evidence and her book as separate from her own interests and political ties. She must constantly perform her respect for the autonomy of the historical record and exude a belief in its ability to speak for itself. In telling Hannity that the "data say it," the statistics Shlaes cites to discredit the New Deal are presented as self-contained, self-evident units of truth. Unlike Hannity whose identity, social ties, and personal convictions are central to how he approaches the Depression's history, Shlaes makes her argument through these statistics and in doing so attempts to remove herself from the argument altogether. By constantly talking about her book and the empirical evidence she cites as self-referential and by simultaneously displaying disinterested mode of analysis, Shlaes masks her own stake and political interest in the Depression's history and constructs the integrity and authority of the evidence she uses.

Shlaes' performance of a disinterested analytical disposition is especially

¹⁶⁶ In chapter seven of his book *Tabloid Television* (1998), John Langer elaborates on the use of popular history in television news and applies McArthur's conception of "the authority of the Real" (p. 136).

pronounced when Hannity asks her about the success of her book. In the beginning of the interview Hannity asks, “Did you ever think it [her book] would ever be this huge?” The structure of Hannity’s question implies a personal relationship between Shlaes and her object of analysis (i.e. the Depression) and, in turn, implies connections between her intellectual work (i.e. her book) and her own ambitions be it monetary, prestige, or political influence. Shlaes pauses for significant moment before answering indicating a discomfort with the question. When she responds, she says, “I never expected a downturn like this. Let’s just say that.” In the second sentence of this response (“Let’s just say that”), Shlaes indicates that she is not prepared to answer such a subjective question. The first sentence implies that historical forces beyond her influence has allowed her book to become successful, again, removing her own interests and actions from the production, promotion, and dissemination of the book. Hannity ends the interview with a similar question: “Why do you think the book has taken off so much?” She responds, “Just because we need to take a second look at the period, and what compelled me, Sean, as...I didn’t need to write it retroactively. The people in the period said it. They said maybe the government’s too big. Maybe the government is too arbitrary. Maybe it’s just aggregating power. And that’s problematic.” In saying that, “I didn’t need to write it retroactively,” Shlaes signals awareness that her revision of the New Deal’s history, like all interpretations of history, could be seen as politically motivated and thus as scientifically illegitimate and less true. To counter this credibility threat, she again stresses the self-referential quality of the evidence she’s rest her historical argument on. She asserts, “The people in the period said it” [not me].”

For more than a half of a decade Shlaes has been writing and teaching about the Great Depression. During this time, her intellectual work on the Depression has been

funded by free market research institutions and supply-side-friendly news outlets that have, like Fox News's journalistic stance, a clear advocacy or *interested* position in producing or disseminating economic knowledge. The writing and research skills Shlaes has been able to hone and the evidence she has been able to accumulate over the years are significantly a product of the conservative knowledge and media institutions that have sustained her career. While Shlaes' is undoubtedly a talented researcher and writer, most of the support she has received for her work has been contingent on her commitment to a laissez-faire ideological approach to history and economics. And while her book maybe well written, its success was very much based on the unprecedented publicity it received by the Republican Party and Fox News. Again, the willingness of these institutions to publicize the book had everything to do with the book's ability to advance a particular political-ideological interest. Yet, when asked about how her book was being used politically in an interview with *Politico* just weeks after the *Hannity* segment, Shlaes again stressed the autonomy of her intellectual work. She responded to the reporter, "insofar as certain policymakers are reading the book, on the authority level, that's really gratifying...And if certain politicians find *The Forgotten Man* useful for making arguments, that's great, but that does not mean that I endorse the individual action of the individual lawmaker...*Books have lives*, and stuff happens to them that you never plan" (Coller and O'Connor, 2009). By presenting her book as having a life of its own, Shlaes seeks to deny her personal and political investment in writing the book and in so doing obscures her (central) place within the conservative knowledge and policy establishment and the social processes, institutions and political interests behind the book's production, promotion and dissemination.

Thus far, I have demonstrated how *Hannity* and Shlaes construct their divergent

populist and intellectual roles by affiliating themselves with different epistemological orientations and bases of knowledge. However, these roles are also constructed in the modes of speech, types of demeanor and forms of discourses Shlaes and Hannity utilize in their discussion as well. For example, near the end of the interview when Shlaes is given an opportunity to make her final point, she uses abstract, dispassionate language when making her critique of the New Deal government calling it “arbitrary” and “problematic.” In contrast, Hannity follows Shlaes final point by stating, “and now it [the present day government] is bigger...And if he [Obama] gets everything he wants, and he will—we are robbing, stealing from our kids and our grandkids, we're taking a baseball bat and smashing open their piggy banks and taking every last cent they've got, and that is morally corrupt as far as I'm concerned.” Unlike Shlaes’ analytical language, Hannity’s rhetoric and physical gestures graphically frames government expansion as an act of aggression describing it as “smashing our children [’s]...piggy banks.” As he says this line, he mimes the swinging of a bat with is arms (see image 4.4 left side).

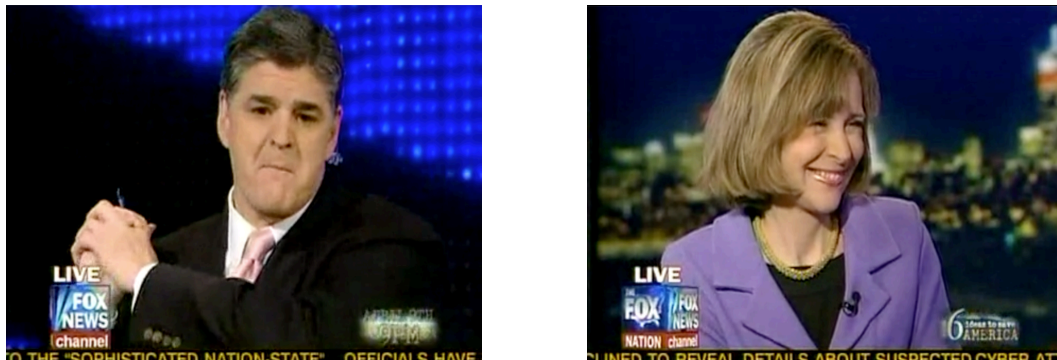


Image 4.4: Hannity "smashing their piggy banks," Shlaes' reaction

In Hannity’s rhetoric, increasing the role of government in the market doesn’t simply “problematize” the workings of abstract political and social structures like the

nation and the economy, it is a palpable threat to the closest members of one's inner circle (a person's children). Following the *invested* character of Hannity's populist mode of address, Hannity again connects the issue under discussion to interpersonal relationships and this connection provides a moral base of justification for taking (and promoting) his anti-Obama, antistatist position.¹⁶⁷ Shlaes' response to Hannity's dramatic and moralistic comment is telling. Instead of adding to it, she first gives a blank facial expression, says nothing, and then offers somewhat of a grimaced smile as if simultaneously put off and amused by Hannity's colorful take on redistributive tax policy (see image 4.4 right side). In returning Hannity's final, impassioned point with silence, Shlaes creates a visibly awkward moment, which demonstrates her uneasiness with addressing political issues in moral and personal terms.¹⁶⁸

Exchanging Roles and the Communicative Versatility of the Fox News Pundit

While I have shown how the Hannity and Shlaes use opposing class-cultural bases of knowledge, discourses, and communicative styles, Hannity more popular and Shlaes more intellectual, pegging the host and guests as purely occupying the roles of

¹⁶⁷ This protecting-our-children-frame or also referred to as "generational theft" had been articulated on Fox News from the beginning of the stimulus debate and was widespread at the tea party protests in April of 2009 often coming in the form having the protestors' actual children (for extra effect) hold signs that read "how am I going to pay for this" and, closer to Hannity's rhetoric, "a bully took my lunch money."

¹⁶⁸ Shlaes' pause and awkward reaction to Hannity's moralistic closing and gestures speaks to the way in which PIT and Fox News programming more generally cannot be totally controlled and planned. Similar to Laura Grindstaff's analysis of daytime television in *The Money Shot* (2002) Fox News producers cannot always predict what the interaction and rapport between the host and the guest will be like when they go on-air. There is no guarantee that a particular dynamic between a Fox host and guest will make for entertaining television and/or make for a more persuasive political interpretation. However, the approximation of these goals can be achieved by the producers' ability to recruit media savvy experts and intellectuals and by recruiting particular hosts and commentators. Through wise selection of personnel, Fox News producers can create the likely conditions for a program and episode to have high entertainment value and political-ideological effect.

“populist” and “intellectual” overlooks the communicative versatility of both Shlaes and Hannity and oversimplifies how the populist-intellectual tactic operates. Although he certainly leans more toward a populist orientation, at moments in the discussion Hannity shifts expressive modes and employs disinterested modes of analysis that convey his commitment to the professional journalistic values of objectivity and neutrality. This ability to alter his disposition and assume a professional posture is central because this allows his popular audience to access and imagine themselves as assuming, through Hannity’s appropriation of this style, a professional and intellectual disposition as well (and the credibility that goes along with it). In the exchange outlined in the beginning of section, after Shlaes offered a list of economic indices to demonstrate the myth of the New Deal’s ineffectiveness, Hannity engages the numbers she offers as if he was a professional researcher himself. More than simply repeating Shlaes’s information in the previous line, Hannity attempts to add to it and thus perform an authentic connection with the statistical knowledge being displayed stating, “but mostly it [the unemployment rate] hovered at 20 percent.” Hannity’s use of statistical discourse not only allows the viewer to imagine they have a handle on this type of information but also makes the intellectual guest’s prior and subsequent usage of such a discourse seem less alien and less elite. By straddling both cultural dispositions and shifting back and forth between populist and professional voices, Hannity’s performance embodies the populist-intellectual tactic and in doing so seeks to resolve the underlying tensions and contradictions between, using Bakhtinian terms, the ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ cultures that Shlaes and Hannity represent.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ This ability to shift from populist to professional modes of analysis is exhibited by Beck and O’Reilly as well. Having a degree in journalism and having worked for newspapers in his earlier

Yet, this type of class-cultural ambidexterity always carries with it a risk. For example, in Hannity's transition from his parents' experience to his use of statistical discourse, subtle differences are exposed between Hannity and Shlaes. When Hannity adds to Shlaes numbers ("but mostly it hovered at 20 percent"), Shlaes responds and actually corrects him in the next lines stating "fourteen, fifteen, like that." In correcting Hannity, Shlaes tacitly reveals Hannity's assumption of a social scientific disposition to be inadequate. Hannity once again becomes lay, popular, and culturally subordinate. In the next line, Hannity confirms this stating simply, "yes," after Shlaes' correction. Aware of the power relations behind her corrective gesture and how it could mark her as a "know it all," Shlaes attempts to trivialize Hannity's error and the numbers themselves ending her sentence with "like that."

As one sees here with Shlaes' "like that" comment, the populist host is not the only actor in the execution of PIT that works to contain the tensions between the popular and the professional intellect. Like the populist hosts, experts and academics are often as communicatively versatile as their populist counterparts. In fact, most academics that appear on Fox News, and on television in general, do so because they understand and are comfortable with the communicative requirements of the television medium and/or have past experience speaking on television and radio. Like Shlaes, they often have worked as journalists for major newspapers and thus have gained the skills to translate the *esoteric* language and presentational style of the intellectual-academic field into the *exoteric* language of the journalistic field.¹⁷⁰ An academic's awareness of the popular

career, Bill O'Reilly especially prides himself in his journalistic professionalism and frequently oscillates between populist and professional modes of analysis.

¹⁷⁰ Pierre Bourdieu (1999) calls this type of academic a "journalist-intellectual" and describes them as a figure that shuttles between the intellectual and journalistic field. Bourdieu argues that the journalist-intellectual exploits both fields he or she moves between in different ways. In the

aesthetic of any given cable show—from talk shows to infotainment programs found on networks like the *History Channel* or *Discovery*—heightens the academic's apprehension of using disciplinary jargon and encourages the intellectual to popularly accent their language and self-presentation. For example, on the *History Channel* an expert on Roman weaponry might tell the audience that, "the chariot was the stealth bomber of its day," or say that the emperor Nero was "one bad hombre." Sometimes this translation works and sometimes, if unsuccessful, an academic's execution of PIT amplifies their cultural elitism making them appear even more alien to the popular audience. However, if the translation is not attempted at all and the academic chooses to express himself/herself strictly as a traditional intellectual, he or she expresses a social disconnectedness that can either mark their voice as irrelevant or, worse, condescending.

When successfully embodying PIT, the academic guest is simultaneously able to convey his/her expertise and prestigious academic pedigree and the notion that her intelligence and knowledge-set complements and affirms that of the viewers. With the help of Hannity and the visual graphics of the show, one sees how Shlaes performs the populist-intellectual tactic. After Hannity summarizes Sumner's argument using the Yale professor's letter scheme to designate the taxpaying producer, the politician, and the

journals field they establish their cultural capital by their mastery of the skills they gained in the academic world. In the academic field, they capitalize on the notoriety they gained by appearing in popular media in order to secure better positions of authority and pay in the academia. Bourdieu argues that journalist-intellectuals degrade the intellectual field because they change the logic of career advancement away from intellectual scholarship toward media savvy and self-promotion. He also argues that their presence on popular television or radio does not change the media or journalistic field because the journalist-intellectual's academic skills and expertise are always made subordinate to the presentational logic of popular media. This logic discourages the very things, Bourdieu argues, that are necessary for intellectual discussion such as abstract, elaborated, and in depth analysis. In short, the representational qualities and the commercial logic of popular media inhibit, for Bourdieu, any real production or transmission of intellectual knowledge (Bourdieu, 1999, pp. 68-72).

welfare recipient, he acknowledges the limits of his authority and concedes the role of teacher and interpreter to Shlaes. This gesture points to her status as an expert. Hannity deferentially says, "Maybe you can make more sense of that than I just tried to describe." In return, she downplays her distance from popular knowledge (and by extension Hannity and the audience) and stresses how the subject matter under consideration is comprehensible to common sense thinking and the only reason it seems otherwise is because of the obscure ways in which the argument is presented. Shlaes states, "Well, it's pretty simple. The algebra sounds complicated, but the forgotten man is the taxpayer who subsidizes a project that the government wants. Maybe it's a good project. Often it's a not-so-good project. And that's what happened in the New Deal." Looking at Hannity's set up of PIT and Shlaes follow through, one sees how her argument is simultaneously stamped with elite distinction and is made to appear (e.g. "it's not hard") accessible to and at level with the analytical capacities of the popular audience.

The populist-intellectual tactic requires that the actors involved demonstrate a communicative flexibility, which allows them to temporarily assume contrary subjectivities so as to repair cultural contentious moments between the popular and professional brands of intellect. However, if the boundaries separating different classed-subjectivities are transgressed too often and the actors do not commit to the performance of a particular cultural disposition, the representational tactic loses its main purpose: which is to exhibit a political-ideological consensus about the history of the Depression that spans different class-cultural bases of authority. The consensus cannot be represented without the prior and continued representation of class-cultural differences between Hannity and Shlaes. The authenticity of both Hannity's populist and

Shlaes's intellectual roles are threatened if either one oscillates too frequently between a professional and populist posture. More, having academics and experts on *Hannity* and other top Fox News programs allow the populist host to cede the professional class voice and, by contrasting himself to the guest's intellectual performance, *Hannity* can further accentuate his performance as an everyday guy. Thus, while *Hannity* by himself embodies PIT in different moments of the "forgotten man" segment, more often than not this tactic works between two or more actors.

Chapter Five Conclusion

The programmers of *Hannity* seem to realize that while a speaker may effectively signal his/her 'official' competence by citing credentials and by demonstrating a professional disposition, the display of professionalism and expertise have far less popular legitimacy if that same speaker is not vouched for by or does not themselves perform the role of a morally concerned, political loyal, personally invested individual. In other words, if the moral character of the expert guest is in question and their moral interests in the issue are not suggested by the moral performance and political affiliation of the host, their demonstration of elite knowledge is less authoritative. Likewise, however, the populist host, being unofficial and uncertified, is even less legitimate on his own. It must not be forgotten that even though the legitimacy of empirical knowledge and formal expertise has been shaken by the rise of postmodern culture and contested by conservative critiques of the educated statist and liberal technocracy, empirical modes of argumentation and "official" sources of knowledge are still the dominant ways of one claims to know the truth about a given topic or the "reality" of a given historical event. Thus, the truth of collective memory and the value of *Hannity*'s cultural tie to the

Depression generation are still dependent on how much it approximates or reinforces institutionally certified knowledge and expert opinion. As seen in the program at various moments, Hannity, the stand-in layman, seeks affirmation again and again from the expert when making points about the Depression and this is replicated on *Glenn Beck* and *The O'Reilly Factor*.

While it is correct to say the Fox News's top programs like *Hannity* emphasize a populist mode of address, it would be wrong to say that they do so at the complete exclusion of professional and intellectual modes of expression. Quite the opposite. In this chapter, I've demonstrated how Fox News programs are not merely a soapbox for blowhards and partisan hacks as often thought. Political liberals and leftist critics underestimate the degree to which Fox News functions a key public outlet for conservative intellectual culture. Granted, conservative writers, academics and experts appear on discussion panels with country singers and sports stars, and their research is presented with extravagant or comical graphics. Yet, their presence and the intellectual culture it represents are a recurrent feature of Fox News's top shows. This was especially the case during the recession and the stimulus debate. Even when intellectuals and academics do not appear in the broadcast as is more often the case with *The O'Reilly Factor*, academic studies and scholarly standards for measuring the truth-value of political claims are—regardless of how superficially and problematically applied—nevertheless invoked and regularly turned to. The fact that these “scholarly” sources predominantly come from openly conservative research institutes and think tanks doesn't negate the fact that the producers of Fox's top programs employ and concern themselves with exhibiting professional and intellectual forms of credibility.

The intellectual aspects of a given Fox News program are often disregarded by

centrist and leftist critics because of their assumptions about the Fox News audience. The stereotypical conception is one of an uneducated viewer that requires overstimulation via flashy graphics and attractive blonde anchors, a viewer who is easily mystified by cultural symbols and respondent to partisan propaganda. This view precludes the possibility that Fox News's viewership might actually have a desire to engage (and in fact sees themselves as participating in) an intellectual culture, and Fox News shows like *Hannity* provide a model for doing this without losing its working-class cultural appeal. Simply because a mass audience may not *privilege* word-based forms of information, expert opinion, and elite cultural styles, does not mean that a majority-non-college-educated-audience discounts or does not want to evaluate the empirical accuracy of a given argument or piece of information.

Fox News's reinterpretation of the Great Depression was effective because the network's interpretative strategy seemed to recognize that in order to construct a new consensus about the Depression and the legacy of the New Deal, their ideological framing of it had to communicate on different class-cultural registers of identity and authority. As political and cultural theorist Antonio Gramsci has argued, a cultural representation that attempts to have hegemonic power and shape the new "commonsense" thinking about a given issue must effectively bridge different levels of ideology linking theoretical ideas with popular beliefs. Gramsci writes, "'Common sense' is the folklore of philosophy and always stands midway between folklore proper (folklore as it is normally understood) and philosophy, science, and economics of the scientist. Common sense creates the folklore of the future, relatively rigidified phase of popular knowledge in a given time and place" (2000, p. 343). In this light, the populist-intellectual tactic that Fox News programs deployed during the stimulus debate can be seen as

highly complex and effective tool for doing hegemonic work *inside* a news text, particularly, for determining how the Great Depression will be remembered in the future collective memory of the nation.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have argued that Fox News's populist representational strategy for covering the Recession helped give its free market interpretation of the economic crisis a moral authority that the Democratic left's interpretation lacked. The national news media no longer has a common epistemological standard and knowledge base. Subsequently, the credibility of facts, expertise, and formalized knowledge are increasingly evaluated not by their methodological soundness or internal merits but by the political affiliation (perceived or actual) of the information source. In this epistemologically fractured environment, Fox News's deployment of populist representational modes and the strategic appropriation of traditional moral discourses became an effective way to maintain and extend a particular political-ideological project. When making claims about what caused the Great Recession and how to solve it, Fox News's top three programs appealed to moral bases of cultural authority and normative conceptions about social hierarchy whose currency surpasses partisan lines and whose legitimacy is not contingent on the approval of any given institutional source, whether conservative or liberal.

Throughout this dissertation I have examined the various ways in which Fox News transformed the debate over how to handle the economic crisis into a moral one. I argued that the most basic way the network achieved the moral authority of its narrative was by presenting itself and its audience as representing the ideal majority and, at the same time, as being an underdog and outsider. As I demonstrated in chapter one, this

majority-outsider positionality works to unify the conservative populist camp and helps establish its moral virtue by suggesting that conservatives have a distance from corrupt institutions such as “mainstream media” on the one hand, and a proximity to moral traditions and common sense on the other.

Next, I demonstrated how Fox News’s claim to represent the “little guy” is given life by overlaying the network’s more generic anti-establishment narrative with a more specific narrative of class conflict. Relying on a narrative structure that has been deployed by conservative populist figures since Senator Joseph McCarthy and Alabama Governor George Wallace, Fox News’s top programs during the Recession framed liberals as a class of educated elites who captured the government and other institutions of public opinion and cultural influence. By consistently associating the liberal political camp with the educated elite, institutional power and professional class tastes, Fox News programming effectively constructed a social gulf between the white working-class and political liberalism. Furthermore, because Fox News presented the white working-class as the authentic majority of the nation and the source and protector of its most enduring values, the reiteration of the social separation between the white working class and liberals expressed an ideological separation between American cultural traditions and progressive policies for addressing the crisis.

In addition to taking a hostile posture towards educated elites, I outlined and exemplified in chapter two various representational techniques Fox News’s top programs used to build their kinship with the white working class. I demonstrated how this was done through the aesthetics of the programming, through the hosts’ implicit and explicit references to a particular structure of taste and through their continual elaborations of their working-class background and cultural past. However, the most important

technique that I stressed in this chapter was how Fox News's top programs constructed and performed a working-class analytical disposition and epistemic culture, which I have referred to as "the popular intellect." By using lay epistemological traditions (e.g. life experience, collective memory) and exhibiting a popular intellect, Fox News's top hosts attempted to signal their cultural affinity with the working-class by *how* they claimed to know what they know rather than simply by *what* arguments they made.

A crucial element to Fox News's representation of the popular intellect was a tendency to counter the empirical, professional analysis of liberal news figures and sources with moralistic modes of analysis. In reframing the criteria of intellectual authority in moral terms, Fox News presented its imagined working and lower-middle-class viewer as an intellectual equal to the educated elites that pervade the world of journalism and politics. While professional journalists and experts may have formal expertise, Fox News's top programs bestow intelligence and dignity to the viewer by suggesting they and their on-air proxy in the form of the host have a moral knowledge and capacity for moral reasoning elite journalists and experts lack. Similarly, sociologist Michele Lamont (2000) notes in her study on the American working-class how in order to view themselves as social equals to those on top of the socioeconomic and socio-educational ladder, American workers tend evaluate their self-worth using moral standards of evaluation as opposed education and income-based definitions of personal success.

Since its launch, but especially since 9/11, Fox News's interpretive strategy for covering political events has involved approaching news stories as occasions to construct its audience as a moral community. In the Bush era, Fox News defined the morality of the conservative viewer by patriotism (e.g. pro-war-on-terror, pro-Defense)

and religiosity (e.g. pro-life, anti-gay marriage). However, with the onset of the Great Recession, economic realities were brought to the forefront of the national consciousness and this new set of conditions created a different set of interpretative challenges for Fox News's existing populist narrative and moralistic analytical approach. Fox News would respond to the historical moment in two primary ways. First, in chapter three, I examined how Fox News's top programs reappropriated the long standing moral-economic strain of populism called producerism and translated it into a pro-business-class version of the discourse that I refer to as "entrepreneurial producerism." Using producerist rhetorical frames, the central way Fox News defined the conservative community during the Recession was as society's "producers," the "job creators." In addition, the central producerist story line that structured Fox News's coverage of the key policy events of the crisis was a narrative about how the hard earned wealth of the producing class was being stolen by the Obama government and transferred to racialized, welfare dependents, reckless banks, and pampered public-sector workers. Another crucial aspect of Fox News's deployment of producerist discourse was how it represented the business class and the private sector working-class as single social bloc that is unified by their common producer ethic. By selectively appropriating the producerist rhetorical tradition, Fox News programming devised a compelling way to represent the conservative community as both the moral center of the Recession era America and as the group most aggrieved by the crisis and thus most entitled to populist outrage.

The second main way Fox News programming sought to construct the conservative viewer as the economic downturn's central moral figure was by presenting contemporary conservatives as true heirs of the long venerated Great Depression

generation. In chapter four, I demonstrated how Fox News's top programs retold the history of the Great Depression but in a way that sought to discredit FDR and the New Deal. By using iconic film footage and imagery from the thirties in the episodes, Fox News's top programs sought to tap the collective memory of the Great Depression. Invoking and representing this memory not only worked as resonant point of reference for Fox News's free market critique of the stimulus package but also served as a powerful way to endow the viewer's experience of economic distress with a similar virtue and historical significance of the Greatest Generation's experience and hardship.

What was implicit in Fox News's retelling of the history of the Great Depression was the notion that the popular base of Obama's supporters lacked the same moral virtue and cultural connection with the Depression generation. The absence of this linkage was critically expressed through Fox's visual representation of the recipients of stimulus aid and by framing the stimulus package and other countercyclical policy measures as new forms of welfare. By contrasting the white, manly blue-collar image of the Great Depression era working-class with images of non-white, service-industry workers hurting in the modern crisis, Fox News programs were able to racialize and feminize Obama's working-class base and construct, through these racial and gender differences, a cultural and moral gap between the Depression generation and the Obama coalition.

In this dissertation my analysis has emphasized the qualities and characteristics of Fox News's coverage of the Recession that are unique in relation to how other major television news outlets covered the crisis. By emphasizing Fox News's unique qualities, that is, its populist mode of address, this project may give the impression that Fox News's top shows are void of empirical discourses, detached analysis and professional

modes of legitimation. In the last chapter, I strived to demonstrate how this is not the case. One of the most brilliant and sophisticated aspects of Fox News's representational strategy during the Recession is how Fox News's top programs balanced popular and professional epistemological standards and integrated conservative intellectual culture into its populist framework. In this chapter, I returned to the subject of how Fox News reinterpreted the history of the Great Depression by deploying the credentialed authority and "profession intellect" of conservative economic historian Amity Shlaes. Rather than approaching populist styles and moral discourses as being mutually exclusive to empirical modes of justification and expert knowledge, Fox News's top programs coordinated elite and popular sources of cultural authority. Moreover, I demonstrated how this representational technique works to temper the elitism of expert knowledge and reconcile the inherent tensions between elite and popular knowledge. I call this coordination the populist-intellectual tactic and, with this concept, in the last chapter I outlined the process by which Fox News's top opinion programs translated free market theory into a popular moral language, which, in turn, made Fox's supply-side interpretation of the Depression and the present economic crisis intelligible as popular knowledge and common sense.

If there is one thing Democrats and leftist cultural-media producers can learn from Fox News, one thing to emulate, it would be to try and match Fox's stylistic versatility and analytical ambidextrousness. To truly compete with Fox News's in the field of political-ideological struggle, the Democratic left must: one) incorporate more voices and figures that exude non-professional class communicative styles and public personas, and two) the Democratic left must place greater investment in devising ways and using its major media platforms for the translation of its intellectual culture into a

moral language, particularly, one that is conversant with populist rhetorical traditions.

One of reasons the Democratic left has not adopted this type of representational strategy is because, since the postwar period onward, liberal political culture has maintained an inflexible commitment to the values of rational enlightenment, social science and the empirical knowledge tradition. One encounters this cultural orientation even in the most popular and seemingly unprofessional news-based talk programs on the left: *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. These programs don a popular presentational aesthetic, have a comedic format with celebrity guests, and use an irreverent tone. However, underneath their parodies of conservative media figures who speak for the folks and know the truth by their “the gut,” the heart of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert’s critique of modern American political culture is that it is no longer “rational” and fact-centered and the implicit political project they advance night in and night out is to “restore sanity” and return to such a place.

Moreover, even popular leftist writers who regularly criticize the Democratic Party’s technocratic tendencies and professional class cultural orientation and repeatedly maintain that the left must adopt of populist strategy continue to perpetuate the notion that moral, utopian discourses and empirical, political economic discourses are mutually exclusive, the prior distorting reality and the later revealing it. This assumption underlies the argument political critic Thomas Frank advances in his new book about conservative populism in the Recession era. In *Pity Billionaire: The Hard-Time Swindle and the Unlikely Comeback of the Right* (2012), Frank asserts, as I do, that the Right’s free market interpretation of the Great Recession worked because it privileged moral and utopian discourses over technical-empirical ones. However, Frank’s approach to the moral, utopian elements of conservative populism has two major

shortcomings. The first is that he argues that the moral-economic logic of the Right is reducible to the philosophy of conservative author Ayn Rand and is essentially driven by the logic of social Darwinism. By reducing conservative populism to the celebration of uninhibited self-interest and plutocracy, i.e. to lines of thought all but a handful of hard core conservative activists and Ayn Rand fans would perceive as moral, Frank gives a nice and easy reason for the reader to dismiss the moral claims of conservative populism and in the process obscures how its moral claims have genealogical ties to left political traditions.

The second major flaw of Frank's analysis is arguably more problematic and is related to a broader analytical tendency I mentioned above, which is to treat moral discourses as untruth and empirical-economic ones as truth. Frank explains the power of conservative populism by the ability of its moral, utopian discourses to "cloud its partisans' perception of reality" (p. 12). In repeating a false dichotomy where moral reasoning is framed as "pure abstraction" (p. 10) and pragmatic reasoning is framed as truth, Frank gives the leftist reader yet another excuse to disregard the moral logic of conservative populism and in doing so ensures that the association of political conservatism and the moral discourses of the populist tradition will remain uncontested. In addition, Frank's acceptance of this false dichotomy leads him to make the inaccurate historical claim that the leftist populism of the 1930s succeeded because, he writes, "matters of subsistence...[took] precedence over noble principles" (p. 18), when in fact the moral message of FDR's Forgotten Man narrative was critical to the rise and success of the New Deal. President Roosevelt had an acute understanding of how politically important it was to offer the public a resonant moral framework for understanding the economic crisis. During the 1932 campaign FDR told one reporter that the presidency,

“is more than an engineering job efficient or inefficient. It is preeminently a place of moral leadership” (Schlesinger, 1957, p. 483).

Leftist political culture in the late-nineteenth-century and the early-twentieth-century had a much stronger understanding of how vital it was to establish the political subject of your movement as a moral subject than its postwar left descendants. As the socialist and populist rhetorical traditions of the left became marginalized and supplanted by the much more technocratic rhetoric of Keynesianism, the left not only increasingly lost the moral and utopian components of its own political project, its intelligentsia increasingly lost the ability to analyze the popular appeal of its political opponents in any other terms but value-free terms. In her book *Social Sciences for What? Philanthropy and the Social question in a World Turned Rightside Up* (2007), historian Alice O'Connor asserts that assumptions about the achievement of non-ideological knowledge and technocratic neutrality hindered the capacity of consensus school liberal critics such as Richard Hofstadter, Seymour Lipset, and Daniel Bell from identifying and taking serious the cultural registers the conservative social movements of the 1950s and 1960s were hitting on. Lacking a more sophisticated cultural analysis and mode of ideology critique, the liberal intellectuals of this period tended to reduce the appeal of conservative populist formations such as McCarthyism and the Barry Goldwater for President movement to irrational fears and, O'Connor writes, “a bundle of impulses and resentments” (p. 109).

Just as Hofstadter recognized more than half a century ago, Thomas Frank's contemporary critique of conservative populism illustrates the important ways in which moral discourses mediate the conservative movement's conception of social hierarchy. However, like Hofstadter, Frank's analytical approach seems only able to conceptualize the Right's moral discourses and free market utopian vision as a tool of deception and

distortion. Merely understanding how the ideology of your political opponent functions as a device of obfuscation and manipulation is what Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch refers to as a “half-Enlightenment.” Following Bloch’s method of cultural criticism, in this dissertation I strived to analyze conservative populism using a “double-coded” concept of ideology (Kellner 1997), that is, a method of ideology critique that demonstrates both how conservative populism propagates errors and mystifications and at the same time, through its utopian program, offers a compelling analysis of what the present social system lacks. As Bloch argues, the distorting elements of a given cultural representation are only sustained and made legitimate by that same cultural representation’s ability to elucidate select forms of oppression and a vision of emancipation from them.¹⁷¹

Resembling Bloch’s method of ideology critique, I find the analytical posture of Marxist political theorist Antonio Gramsci particularly constructive for analyzing conservative populism. Imprisoned by the Mussolini regime in 1926, Gramsci continued to develop his intellectual work while incarcerated producing the famous “prison notebooks.” As Gramsci scholar Timothy Brennan points out, Gramsci regularly reviewed the rightwing periodicals of his era such as the *Critica Fascista* and the ideas of prolific rightwing writers such as Giovanni Gentile and Luigi Pirandello. Brennan writes, “Gramsci tended to *learn* by absorbing the lessons of the popular conservative forces of his day...he modeled his arguments as answers to those in the ascendant of modern thought, whatever their persuasion (Brennan, 2007, p. 251). Gramsci, like Frank, was a committed interpreter of the right-wing discourses that predominated his political time. However, in contrast to Frank’s seek and debunk analytical strategy, Gramsci’s analysis

¹⁷¹ For an overview of and strong argument for the resuscitation of Ernst Bloch’s method of cultural criticism see (Kellner, 1997).

of conservative discourse was less interested in exposing conservative techniques of deception and more interested in how and in what ways the conservative discourses of his time offered a resonant explanatory framework for understanding the contradictions of the historical moment.

In *Pity the Billionaire* (2012), Frank finds ridiculousness and unreality at every corner of conservative political culture. In fact, Frank goes as far as to compare Glenn Beck's interpretation of the Great Recession and the Tea Party mobilization to Orson Welles' fake Mars-invasion radio broadcast and the hysteria caused by it (p. 66). For Gramsci, the ability of a given discourse to gain popular acceptance and widespread legitimacy—regardless of the political project it serves—is partly the result of how the discourse speaks to certain conditions of existence that the popular masses are experiencing. To construct an effective leftist political project that could counter and defeat the rightwing opposition, Gramsci maintained that the left had to first explain the ascendancy of their discourses, figure out what is desirable about their solutions and attractive about their vision for the future.

Before the Democratic left can learn from conservative populism and Fox News, it must rid itself of some of the mental blockages that have hindered and continue to hinder the left from taking something constructive from conservative populism. In the next section, I will address two analytical pitfalls for studying conservative populism: one) a tendency to overlook the subversive, popular-democratic or emancipatory components of conservative populism as a result of overemphasizing how it induces false-consciousness, and two) a tendency to underestimate the complexity of conservative media texts as result of assuming its their popular force derives from the ideological isolation and social seclusion of the conservative media audience.

False-consciousness: the Perennial Non-Analysis of Conservative Populism

In this dissertation, I have argued that class identity lies at the center of Fox News's populist representational strategy. Now, a liberal or leftist reader may scoff at this idea. If any thing, they might say that Fox News, like conservative thought itself, downplays if not completely denies the very existence of class differences in the United States. Curiously, conservative intellectuals have been some of the first to recognize (and loath) the classed nature of the kinds of conservative populism that fills Fox News programming. Watching this brand of populism take hold in the formative decade of the 1970s, the *National Review*, a historical forum of conservative intellectual thought, published several articles criticizing the increasing rise of conservative populist politicians like George Wallace. In his essay "Country & Western Marxism," columnist Chilton Williamson Jr. identifies, as exemplified in the title, both the discourse of cultural populism and its classed quality. In this article Williamson criticizes Nixon advisors such as Kevin Phillips who, at the time, were advocating a cultural populist representational strategy that was built around, he writes, "inflaming [the working-class] prejudices by flattering their customs and tastes" (1978, p. 713). The danger in doing this, Williamson argues, is that conservative populists could inadvertently incite other kinds of class resentment as well and this could risk unleashing a more generalized class hostility that the left could take advantage of. Unlike many of their leftist counterparts who tend to be more tied to economic definitions of class, conservative intellectuals recognize how important the cultural qualities of class are and therefore how multidimensional class identity in fact is. In doing so, conservative intellectuals, both past and present, have demonstrated an understanding of American class politics that are, in light of their

supposed denial of class difference, surprisingly complex and nuanced.

The most prolific leftist critic who recognizes conservative populism as an attempt by conservative political figures to speak the language of social class is no doubt Thomas Frank. However, before I proceed to criticize Frank some more it is only right that I acknowledge the great intellectual debt I owe to his work. When I read Frank's most famous and controversial book *What's the Matter with Kansas* (WMK) for the first time back in 2005, the book struck a deep chord with me crystalizing my personal political interests in way no book had done before. I was born in 1979, at the dawn of Reaganomics. I grew up in the conservative state of Utah, and was raised in a family that has been proudly blue-collar and working-class for generations. Symbolizing the historical shift of most of the family's political orientation, my grandfather was a loyal Democrat for his entire life until voting for Reagan over Carter in 1980. From that point onward, the Peck's have predominantly (and often loudly) supported Republican candidates and my grandfather's living room bears the marks of this shift. Today, one finds both an old Norman Rockwell painting of JFK on the wall and Sean Hannity on the television.

In many ways, the enduring intellectual questions I have returned to throughout the development of this dissertation concerning conservatism, populism and class identity were first articulated by WMK. Frank has done an invaluable service by bringing these questions to the fore of leftist intellectual discussions. Like WMK, his new book on the Great Recession era, *Pity the Billionaire* (2012), Frank demonstrates again his astuteness at locating and identifying the key themes, story lines and archetypes of the latest manifestation of conservative populism. However, while I admire Frank and applaud his work on many levels, it is not enough to have a sharp cultural radar. *How*

one analytically approaches the stylistic and discursive elements of conservative populism once identified is as important as whether or not one approaches them in the first place. In fact, one can hinder progressive political goals by popularizing reductive approaches to analyzing conservative populism as aspects of Frank's analysis tends to do.

Unfortunately, in the time from *What's the Matter with Kansas?* (2004) to *Pity the Billionaire* (2012), Frank has not moved beyond the false-consciousness conceptual framework he relies on in both these books. As a result, his analysis begins from a dismissive position and subsequently offers little insight into how conservative representations of class conflict somehow—even though their supposedly baseless and ridiculous—continue to serve the conservative movement's attempts to represent itself as being on the side of the little guy and gain the moral high ground as a result.

When analyzing representations of working-class conservatism too often there is an analytical tendency amongst leftist critics to produce a class-as-substitution-for-something else argument. Frank's work has done the most to popularize this line of argument writing that conservative class politics is, "based on a way of thinking about class that both encourages class hostility and simultaneously denies the economic basis of the grievance" (2004, p. 113). By using such a narrow, economistic definition of class, Frank presents yet another false dichotomy whereby economic-class is deemed "real" class and class-culture is seen as sociological fluff, a subsidiary or substitution for what really matters about class identity.

However, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's research demonstrates that cultural and symbolic facets of class are far from fluff. As opposed to framing them as mutually exclusive, Bourdieu's theory of class demonstrates how subjective class and objective

class, culture and economics, taste and labor are co-constitutive social elements that represent different moments of the same overarching process of class differentiation. Without the cultural components of class, the fluctuations and crises of the market would make it more difficult to replicate class formations across generations, across geographic space, and across society. However, through cultural capital, education and what Bourdieu calls the “symbolic violence” of class, class groupings are stabilized and made more path-dependent.¹⁷² Cultural and educational inheritance gives economic inheritance a far greater lasting power than it would have otherwise.

The causal relationship between educational capital and leadership positions in the majority of institutions in society, whether public and private, has a commonsense quality and colloquially the word “educated” can, in certain contexts, be as powerful a class distinguisher as “rich.” Educational inadequacy, while not comparable to material deprivation, creates class stigmas all the same, not to mention the fact that it can deny one a decently paying job. In short, class domination does in fact occur through the production of credentials, expertise, through the educational system and through cultural, aesthetic and symbolic practices. Thus, the anti-elitist, cultural populist rhetoric that pervades Fox News’s programming discourse does express *some* meaningful class tensions. If it didn’t it would be hard to imagine how it has been so effective at laying symbolic claim to the white working-class. The true ideological maneuver of Fox News’s populist representational strategy is not to replace real class identities with fake ones as Frank suggest, but rather to offer a limited conception of class hierarchy that foregrounds *real* class-cultural tensions in order to obscure *real* economic ones. As literary theorist

¹⁷² For another key text that explores the role that cultural and subjective dimensions of class play in the reproduction of class hierarchies see (Sennett and Cobb, 1993).

Kenneth Burke once said, “a selection of reality is also a deflection of reality” (1966, p. 45).

While it is true that the narrowness of Fox News’s cultural representation of class is often stereotypical and, in the end, deceptive in that it strategically conceals relations of domination within the private economy, rather than dismissing it wholesale on these grounds, the Democratic left should pay close attention to the elements of Fox News populist representational strategy that do make compelling class identifications. Yet, the tendency of many leftist analyses is to conduct in depth readings of reactionary and authoritarian elements of conservative populist discourse on one hand and offer shallow analyses of the conservative populist critique of power, its claim to rebellion, its moral, utopian vision of a better future on the other.

Establishing an analytical framework whose popularity amongst liberal critics has endured to the present, consensus school intellectuals like Bell and Hofstadter explained the conservative populist formations of their day such as McCarthyism and the Goldwater for President movement with a “status anxiety” thesis. This thesis rests on the idea that conservative populism is the result of the incitation and political mobilization of the white-middle-class’s fears around losing their race-based and newly gained social privileges. In his book *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism From Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (2011), Corey Robins goes further suggesting that the very DNA of conservative thought, born from Edmund Burke’s writings and seventeenth century English politics, is rooted in an reactionary tendency to protect social hierarchy in all its forms. Holding to the belief that human beings find the idea of individual supremacy more attractive than social equality, Robins argues that since the development of popular democracy, the “permanent political project” of conservatism has been and

continues to be an attempt to make “privilege palatable to the democratic masses” (p. 100).

Painting your political opponent’s belief system as essentially driven by the primitive instinct to protect their power and privilege at all cost may make one feel good about the moral standing of one’s own belief system, but it leads the analyst down a dead end street if the goal is to develop an understanding of why one’s political opponent’s ideology has achieved a widespread moral legitimacy. When one views conservative populism as a discourse that simply communicates rationalizations for inequalities based on race, gender and income, it allows the analyst to relinquish any obligation to substantively understand where conservative moral authority and underdog claim derives from. As the work of Antonio Gramsci has stressed, all hegemonic projects make certain concessions, whether symbolic or material, to factions of the subordinate masses in order to maintain a dominant position (Gramsci, 1971; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Hall, 1988; Grossberg, 1992). Thus, following hegemony theory, it should make sense that discourses that rationalize privilege would be accompanied by or entangled with subversive and even progressive discursive elements. Thus, the key to truly challenging the hegemonic project of one’s political opponent is as much about exposing its contradictions as it is about capturing or taking back its progressive elements.

Embodying some of the key moral justifications for the American Revolution, the egalitarian discourses of producerism and cultural populism that I have documented in Fox News programming are deeply embedded in American culture. Therefore, it is unlikely that any successful political discourse can circumvent these logics and hail a political subject solely through discourses of social supremacy and not simultaneously

utilize discourses that hail a populist, egalitarian, underdog subject. Seeking to understand the egalitarian elements and moral logics of conservative populism does not have to mean that one must defer questions of how conservatism populism makes white majoritarian appeals and/or takes advantage of normative masculinity. On the contrary, a double-coded analysis elucidates how the reactionary discourses of the conservative movement deflect the moral critique of the left and forestall moral reflection within the movement, and subsequently endure and continue to be perceived as legitimate forms of political expression.

Echo Chambers and the Continued Underestimation of the Conservative Text

Another problematic analytical tendency I found the literature on conservative populism, particularly, conservative media is the notion that conservative political messaging succeeds because it enjoys built in advantages and not because the qualities of the political messaging itself. As media scholars like Robert McChesney suggest (2003), conservative discourse is effective because it expresses pro-corporate and pro-rich political positions and thus its power is attributed less to its popular resonance and more to the fact that its ideological message is compatible with the interests of the corporate controllers of the mass media. In other words, media and political figures that wield conservative populist discourse enjoy greater financial backing from powerful business interests and the ultra-wealthy and, in turn, do not face the kind of censorship in the corporate-driven media system of the United States that genuine leftist voices who, by virtue of their anti-corporate politics, inevitably face. While this kind of political economic argument has great truth to it, it has a limiting explanatory power and too often it leads the analyst to overlook the sophistication of conservative political texts and

sidestep the question of their resonance.

Since the Gilded Age, cultural producers, journalists and public intellectuals promoting laissez-faire ideology have received the financial support of powerful industrial interests, yet, laissez-faire ideology has not always enjoyed the degree of public legitimacy it has today. With the rise of the New Deal order, laissez-faire ideology was significantly discredited. What is crucial to remember is that this ideology was delegitimated in a political culture where the most established daily newspapers of 1930s—the dominant medium of political communication of the era—were against FDR and powerful economic elites like the du Pont family, the Koch Brothers of the day, aggressively mobilized corporate interests against the New Deal. Yet, laissez-faire ideology was not reinvented as it was during the Great Recession of the late-2000s. In short, having political economic clout helps immensely but does not guarantee one's ideology will become hegemonic or recover from crises of legitimacy.

Arguably an even more popular argument for the success of the conservative populist discourse is the isolated exposure argument articulated by Jamieson and Cappella in their book *Echo Chamber* (2008). Like the McChesney-esque political economic arguments, this line of argumentation resist in depth analysis of conservative discourse by suggesting that the most important thing about conservative political media is, in the end, not the quality of its messaging but the audience's limited exposure to alternative views. While Cappella and Jamieson's argument is itself more nuanced, isolated exposure and media fragmentation arguments often devolve into a description of the conservative talk media audience as members of a cult. Like the cult member who has been sequestered from friends, family and the outside world by the cult leader, the ideological orientation of the conservative media consumer is depicted as being the

result of how much more impressionable (mentally vulnerable) the conservative audience member is due to being inundated by only one political viewpoint. It is not only the left that uses this frame of analysis to explain their opponent's political affiliation, conservative commentators (and relatives) often dismiss the quality of leftist or liberal discourse by painting higher education, the supposed source of all liberal views, as a sequestered (e.g. ivory tower), cult-like experience.

As a cultural analyst, Frank's *Pity the Billionaire* (2012) does apply a close reading of conservative media texts. All the same, Frank's thesis ultimately falls back on an echo chamber-like argument stating that conservatives occupy, "gigantic playground for self-segregation," a "culture of closure" and especially in times of crisis like the recent Recession they, he maintains, "wall themselves off with airtight philosophical structures" (2012, pp. 156-157). As opposed to attributing the success of the conservative movement's representational strategy to its sophistication, Frank's analysis assumes it only resonates because conservatives live on another planet and operate by an alien cultural logic.

As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the fundamental flaw with this type of argument is that it only explains how the Right maintains the ideological conformity of its own flock. It doesn't explain how laissez-faire ideology and conservative media went from a marginal position to a dominant one and why Fox News's ratings expanded during the Recession, why its narrative was adopted outside the conservative media echo chamber and why the conservative interpretation of the Recession drove the terms of the national debate and not simply the debate within the conservative movement. In short, echo chamber type arguments lack a theory and explanation of social and political change. Frank is right to stress how the analyst of conservative populism should

examine the “main sources of its ideas” (p. 179), he is wrong to assume these ideas are exclusively rooted in the texts of conservative intellectuals and political activists.

In this dissertation, I have argued that the power of Fox News’s populist representational strategy was how it used deeply embedded moral logics to frame the Great Recession, logics that have widespread currency that transcend the borders of conservative media and political culture. As I have surveyed and analyzed Fox News’s populist mode of address and explained the moral logics it used to frame the Great Recession, I have strived to give the leftist and centrist reader a different engagement with Fox News than what they will find in the majority literature on the network, an engagement that seeks to show them how elements of their own belief system are present in the culture of Fox News and the conservative movement. In turn, for conservative readers, I have strived to demonstrate how populism, the producer ethic, and elements of working-class culture are NOT inherently tied to conservative politics and instead these linkages are created by Fox News and other producers of conservative discourse. By denaturalizing the connection between populism and political conservatism, this project suggests to the conservative reader the possibility that the values, cultural practices, and sources of dignity they may deeply identify are not inherently in tune with free market ideological positions. In turn, through this same process of denaturalization, this project seeks to show the liberal and leftist readers that modern populism and its core moral discourses are far more mutable than they appear and do not always have to be the vehicle of conservative ideas.

Appendix One: Methodology

I first started developing my ideas on Fox News by watching the network's programming irregularly beginning in 2007 through 2008. At this time, I was conducting historical research on the rise of the postwar right, the country music industry and the history of American populist rhetorical traditions. While watching Fox News programming, I began increasingly to notice the recurrence of populist motifs, story structures, and archetypes, especially those formulated by the conservative movement during the Nixon era. In early 2009, I noticed how the presence of populist rhetorical frames in Fox News programming became even more pronounced and it is at this moment that I committed to watching Fox News's top three programs on a consistent basis. From early 2009 through the year, I regularly watched Fox News's top programs and took notes as I watched. During this period, I developed a basic set of interpretative categories and formulated a preliminary theoretical framework for analyzing Fox News's use of a populist discourses and its representation of a working-class cultural identity.

Over the course of this period I discovered that while the terms elite, elitist, and elites were commonly used in Fox News programming, the term populist and/or populism—though still present—were less common. However, this is not because populist rhetorical framing was not central during this period of programming but because Fox News has its own special populist vocabulary for signifying “the people.” Over the course of my observation, I became increasingly familiar with the customized populist lexicon of Fox News programming and the core themes and discussion topics that surrounded its use of populist terms. I began to list the repertoire of terms that were used in Fox News programming to signify the two opposing social blocs. For example,

“the folks,” “the little guy,” “hard working Americans,” “blue collar,” “ordinary,” “regular guy,” “job creator,” “middle America,” “taxpayer” and “small business owners” were often used as stand-ins for the populist signifier of ‘the people.’ And terms like “elitist mentality,” “intellectuals,” “media elite,” “cultural elite,” and “Big Government,” “inside the beltway” and “liberal elite” were frequently used to signify the elite camp.

Through the year of 2010, I continued watching Fox News programming but did so irregularly to see if the same interpretative frames and set of terms appeared. Finding rhetorical consistencies, in April in 2010 I advanced the depth and systematicity of my analysis and began using the transcript database Factiva. I found Factiva more useful than LexisNexis (the predominant database for broadcast transcripts) because not only did Factiva have (at the time) transcripts for more Fox News programs and a broader stretch of time going back to 1999, the database was more user friendly in providing helpful visual graphs and timelines to test and demonstrate phrase and topic frequency across the Great Recession period. Though using Factiva does not amount to a proper, scientific content analysis of term representativeness, the database’s statistical and graph-based analytical tools gave me a general way to test and measure the recurrence of phrases, topics, and persons of interest that I found significant in my observations and notes. Using Factiva, I narrowed down the expansive list of populist signifiers and topics that I had gathered over the course of 2009 and 2010 to the most recurrent terms. From this abridged set of terms and topics, I searched the transcripts of Fox News’s top three shows between September 1, 2008 and December 31, 2010 (roughly from the financial collapse to the midterm elections) and formulated a pool of broadcast transcripts ranging around 800 individual transcripts of episode segments.

Within this body of transcripts, I looked at the context of the usage of Fox News's core populist signifiers. Searching the terms "elite," "elites," "elitist," and "elitists," I discovered the adjectives and social groups that were tied to these terms were most often cultural in quality. For example, "media elite," "Washington elite," "Hollywood elite," "coastal elite," and "cultural elite" were far more frequent than "economic elite," "business elite," "corporate elite," or "financial elite." Rhetorical trends like these enabled me to test my earlier observations that Fox News programming tends to conceptualize social hierarchy more in cultural terms than in economic terms. Moving the analysis beyond identifying the basic themes and identity groups, I began to conduct closer readings of the transcripts. Using discourse analysis (Laclau and Mouffe, 1990) and analytical tools of the literary-critical linguistic tradition (Hall, 1975), I began to map the more subtle and complex signifying processes in the Fox News broadcast, namely, the narrative structures that elaborate the relations of antagonism behind the use of populist terms and the moral rationales that are given to justify taking an oppositional stance toward the elite.

In addition to enabling me to better identify the more complex narrative and thematic structures, I also used this body of transcripts to identify and confirm the important ways in which hosts and guests assume particular analytical and epistemological positions as they argue particular policies and points. However, because the argumentative and epistemological styles the hosts and guests assume are often accented and signaled by degrees of emotional expressiveness and dispositional characteristics, I particularly relied on video examples to analyze these qualities of the broadcast, which I will discuss shortly. As I surveyed this collection of transcripts, I developed a coding system based on four main categories: identity groups and cultural

references (e.g. working class vs. professional class taste cultures), narrative-thematic structures (e.g. cultural populism and producerism), key topics of discussion (e.g. the Great Recession and the Great Depression), competing modes of analysis and epistemological orientations (e.g. moral vs. technical analysis, popular vs. professional intellect). After coding the body of transcripts, I selected the transcripts that either exemplified all of the coding categories at once or especially exemplified one of the coding categories. Moving to the final stage of textual analysis where I consider the aesthetic, presentational style of Fox News's top shows, the visuals, and the embodied performance of the hosts and guests, I would take this select collection of exemplary transcripts and match them to the corresponding video episodes and segments.

I retrieved video of Fox News broadcasts in two ways. From early 2009, I began to gather as many of the episodes and segments from the Internet sources (mainly from YouTube) that I could find. In 2009, I created an informal and spotty video archive of Fox News episodes. There were many limitations to this method of retrieval: one) it is very difficult to find a full episode of a Fox News program online, which inhibits one from interpreting the transition graphics and from analyzing the crucial rhetorical and semantic relationships between the segments and two) what is available online is limited and very random. However, using this method I was able to find a select set of segments that I wanted and, using these segments, I conducted preliminary aesthetic and dispositional analyses. The second method for retrieving and analyzing video of Fox News programs was far superior. In December of 2010, I developed contacts with the Communication Studies Department at UCLA. This department has one of few cable television archives in the United States and this archive happened to have full episodes of Fox News's top three programs during the Recession period. In addition, because each episode

included closed captioned text I could exactly match the dates and text from my transcript archive to the video episodes. Moreover, as I zeroed in on Fox News's coverage of the Great Recession, I could align key coverage periods that were highlighted by content analyses done on the Recession era media coverage with the episodes I requested. For example, using the UCLA archive I was able to return to the key programming months of January, February, and March of 2009, months that represent spikes in coverage of economic-related stories across the national media.¹⁷³ I was also able to have full access to Fox News's programming during the key months of the crash of 08' (September and October), a programming period that preceded the beginning of my regular viewing of Fox News episodes. In the beginning, I took several trips up to UCLA and watched programming in Communication Studies Department's video lab. However, eventually the lab assistants and I developed an arrangement where they could temporally stream the episodes I needed online which I would request via email. Through the end of 2010 to present, I have continued to retrieve and analyze episodes from the UCLA archive.

Using the transcripts and the verbal-rhetorical interpretative categories that I had developed as the base of my analysis, I analyzed the corresponding video to the transcripts and applied Barthesian methods of semiotic analysis to understand and document how the aesthetics of the graphics, the visual imagery and footage and the embodied performances of hosts and guests accented, added to, concealed and/or altered the meaning of the verbal articulation of populist rhetorical frames. Within the video archive I had accumulated, I organized and coded the video using similar

¹⁷³ Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. (2009). *Covering the Great Recession: How the Media Have Depicted the Economic Crisis During Obama's Presidency*. Retrieved from http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/covering_great_recession.

categories that I used with the archive of transcripts. However, unlike my collection of transcripts, with my video archive I particularly coded episodes and segments in terms of different aesthetic orientations and emotional dispositions that were displayed in a given episode and in terms of different epistemological approaches that often are complemented by these varying emotional, bodily dispositions.

Even though my usage of the Factiva database helped give my analysis quantitative orientations, in the end my formal analytical approach and thus this entire project overall is primarily qualitative. However, my core assertion that anti-elitist rhetoric and appeals to ‘the people’ are representative rhetorical patterns on Fox News has been shown quantitatively by Conway et al’s content analysis of Fox News’s number one show *The O’Reilly Factor* (2007). While they do not describe *The O’Reilly Factor’s* recurrent appeal to what they call “plain folks” as populism or situate this appeal within the historical tradition of American populist rhetoric as I do, Conway et al demonstrate that framing conservative guests, the hosts and the Fox News audience as members of the “plain folks” is one of the most central rhetorical trends on *The Factor* (203-206). Kathleen Jamieson and Joseph Cappella quantitative, quantitative analysis of what they call “the conservative media establishment” includes an analysis of Fox News programming along with talk radio and in both cases the authors point to the centrality and recurrence of anti-elitist frames (p. 59-74). In addition, the two major critical textual analyses that have been done on *The O’Reilly Factor* both cite and stress the recurrence of the dichotomy between “the folks” and “the elites” (Norton, 2011; Peters, 2010). Interestingly, content and textual analyses that have been conducted of Rupert Murdoch’s news papers in Australia and in the U.K. have demonstrated that News Corp’s newspapers have consistently used anti-elitist rhetorical frames since the 1980s

(Sawyer and Goot, 2004; Du Gay, 2008; McKnight, 2012). The literature on Fox News's history, histories and biographies of its key creative figures and various interviews that have been done with Fox News's leadership and star hosts that I reviewed in the course of my research all reinforce my claim that populist, anti-elitist framing is central to Fox News programming and marketing discourse.

However, beyond confirming my claim that Fox News programming includes the basic populist rhetorical framework, the intricacies within this framework that I identify such as cultural populism, producerism, the popular intellect, Fox News's supply-side interpretation of the Recession, the network's engagement with the history of the Great Depression and the network's deployment of intellectuals all lack *proper* quantitative support and could benefit from a more systematic and thorough quantitative analysis. However, this said, what has not been adequately revealed in the literature on Fox News programming is how nuanced and complex Fox News programming is. Quantitative methods are ill-suit tools for capturing the textual complexity and latent meanings of Fox News programming. Deploying critical-literary linguistic analysis, semiotic and dispositional analysis and cultural genealogical methods of analysis, my project attempts to achieve what few works on Fox News's has been able to do, which is capture how Fox News programming conveys deep-seated moral values, includes sophisticated, multi-tiered modes of legitimation, exhibits elaborate narrative processes and subtle modes for expressing cultural identities.

The fact that there have only been a few analyses of Fox News that have conducted truly close readings of the network's programming speaks to an unspoken assumption about Fox News programming that runs through the majority of popular and academic work that has been done on Fox News, which is that Fox News programs are

not complex cultural texts. Therefore, Fox News programming, these studies suggests, do not require sophisticated analytical models and such close analysis. My project strives to encourage more scholarship that approaches conservative media texts using thick, in depth methods of cultural analysis. The interpretative categories and concepts developed through doing multi-sensory, close readings of Fox News programming could offer historical and quantitative studies of Fox News descriptive tools that more adequately account for the complexity, substance, and depth of Fox News's representational system.

Even though my methodology fundamentally rests on historical and qualitative critical-textual analysis, in the course of my research I sought to confirm my interpretations of Fox News programming discourse by investigating other important sites for the production of conservative discourse. From 2009 through 2011, I conducted interviews with political activists and media industry figures and conducted participant observations at various Tea Party events in San Diego and at the events of other conservative political advocacy organizations. Let me begin with the industry figures. It was exceptionally and annoyingly difficult to get interviews with Fox News pundits and production staff. However, I did manage to conduct interviews with two recurring Fox News pundits over the phone. One interviewee only agreed to do an off-the-record interview and the other allowed me to record the interview (3/19/2012; 12/19/2011). Through the one, recorded hour-long interview, I learned a great deal about the production practices and presentational priorities of Fox News programming and this helped inform my textual analytical approach. Even though valuable, the limited amount of interviews I could get with Fox News staff and pundits hindered my ability to understand the behind the scene news practices that is vital for any analysis of a major

news organization like Fox News. To compensate, I reviewed numerous interviews that other reporters and biographers were able to get with Fox News executives, hosts, and staff, which I cite throughout the dissertation.

Formal interviews and informal discussions I had with conservative talk radio hosts—who were far more accessible—were insightful in helping me see the presentational and discursive similarities and differences between conservative talk radio programs and Fox News’s top opinion programs. On August 17, 2011, I conducted an hour-long interview with a San Diego conservative talk radio host who gave me great ideas about how to situate Glenn Beck and other Fox News hosts’ presentational styles in the broader conservative media landscape. He also described his own experience on cable news programs on Fox News and MSNBC, which, as a radio host, he disliked due to what he described as the limiting, overly rigid, fast paced format structure of television news.

Especially insightful were the media training workshops I attended and the informal discussions I had with conservative media figures at the *RightOnline* conferences I attended in Las Vegas, Nevada July 22-23-2010 and in San Diego, Californian January 29, 2011. The *RightOnline* conference is a counterpoint to the liberal *Netroots Nation* conference, it is hosted by the conservative political advocacy organization *Americans for Prosperity*, and is tied the Tea Party movement. Like *Netroots Nation*, the *RightOnline* conference primarily functions as a forum for teaching activists social media strategies.¹⁷⁴ Attending these two conferences was useful because many of the discussion panels were small and intimate forums that were

¹⁷⁴ The *RightOnline* conference and *Americans for Prosperity* are significantly funded by the Koch Brothers of Koch industries and played a crucial role in organizing Tea Party activists for the 2010 midterm elections and continue to play a crucial role in the Tea Party and the conservative movement more generally.

directed by prominent talk radio hosts, Internet publishers and heavy weights in world of conservative media. Moreover, many of these workshops directly dealt with training activists how to engage in journalistic practices in panels such as “Basic Investigative Reporting Skills” (July 23, 2010) and “Old Media, New Media and The Role of Citizen Journalism” (July 23, 2010) and/or taught audience members how to cultivate a compelling mode of address for podcasting, online publishing and public speaking in general.

In a panel titled, “Speaking Right: Communicating the Message Effectively,” I listened to presentations from conservative media pioneer Richard Viguerie and, after the panel, was able to have a discussion with conservative columnist Peter Roff of *U.S. News & World Report*. At the San Diego RightOnline conference panels that I attended such as “Effective Online Radio & Podcasting” and “Using Humor for Effective Content” outlined key presentational priorities of conservative talk media such as “being authentic,” “being likable,” the importance of having liberal guests on to create confrontation for entertainment value, establishing a clear persona and story about oneself, all themes columnist Peter Roff also stressed in his presentation at the Las Vegas conference. At the San Diego conference, I was able to have off-the-record discussions with conservative talk media veterans Brett Winterble and Ed Morrissey. In addition, throughout these conferences I had various informal discussions with grassroots activists and attendees about the Recession, about the state of the media, what kind of media programs and media figures they liked or thought were effective and why. Attending these conferences was insightful as well because they allowed me to see and briefly meet conservative media stars and prominent conservative politicians that frequently appeared on Fox News. Seeing media figures such as Judge Napolitano

(e.g. a Fox News pundit), Herman Cain (e.g. conservative talk radio host and former Republican presidential candidate) Rep. Michelle Bachman, Rep. Mike Pence, and the late conservative internet publisher Andrew Breitbart in person and interacting with attendees gave me another perspective when evaluating their on-air performances on Fox News.

In these conferences, I also found strong consistencies between the discourses that were used by both attendees and speakers in the workshops and presentations and the discourses found in Fox News programming that I foreground in this study. In one panel at the Las Vegas conference titled “Prosperity 101: Citizen Economic Education,” panelists Herman Cain, AFP executive director Linda Hansen, and Wall Street Journal’s John Fund gave presentations and passed out DVD’s and literature on how to teach friends, employees, and co-workers about the moral virtues of capitalism. The rhetoric these panelists used in their presentations and the discourse of the literature that was being handed out was strikingly similar to my analysis of producerism in chapter three and four. Moreover, cultural populist discourses were pervasive as well in these conferences, especially in the workshops devoted to citizen journalism and amateur news production practices. Audience members were repeatedly told by the professional news industry panelists running the workshops that mainstream journalists look down on ordinary citizens and doubt their ability to produce intelligent commentary and reporting. However, the panelists maintained that, thanks to the help of new digital technologies and the Internet, “ordinary” people could circumvent the ‘mainstream media’ and challenge their authority. In essence, the speakers running these workshops framed the audience of grassroots conservative activists as monadic versions of Fox News. As individuals wielding the tools of social media, the narrative they were told about their

political and cultural role mirrored Fox News's central narrative and *raison d'etre* in the news industry.

The last sites of conservative discourse that I turned to test and orient my interpretations of Fox News programming were the various San Diego Tea Party events I attended between 2009 through 2011. On April 15, 2009, the day the first nationally coordinated Tea Party protest occurred, fellow colleagues and I went down to the San Diego County Regional U.S Post Office where the largest Tea Party protest was held in San Diego County. There, I took notes on the protest signs and conducted numerous audio-recorded interviews with activists. The following year, April 15, 2010, I attended the second nationally coordinated protest in the same location and, again, conducted audio-recorded interviews with participants and took notes. Notably, the discourses I observed at these protests in the signs, speeches, and in the interviews predominantly dealt with the issue of wealth distribution. Moreover, they closely resembled producerist populist rhetoric. For example, at the April 15, 2009 protest, I noted a middle-aged man wearing work boots and jeans holding a sign that read, "spread my work ethic, not my wealth." Another sign a protestor was carrying read, "socialism: trick-up poverty," again playing on the themes of unjust wealth distribution. I also analyzed the national news coverage and the extensive array of photos and video coverage of other Tea Party protests across the nation. In doing so, I found similar producerist, theft-oriented rhetorical frames and themes in the protestors' signs. For example, a recurring sign that was used at Tea Party protests across the country was a sign that showed a picture of Obama as Robin Hood and a sign that read "free markets, not free loaders." While few critics of the Tea Party and Recession era conservative populist discourse recognized its producerist genealogical roots, I am not the only one to make the connection between

Tea Party rhetoric and populist producerism. *New York Times* columnist David Brooks (2009) and *The New Republic* columnist John Judis (2010) both tie the rhetoric of the Tea Party protests of 2009 and 2010 to the populist producer tradition.

On October 10, 2010, I attended a formalized Tea Party event that was held in Oceanside, California at the Oceanside Pier Plaza Amphitheatre. I did not conduct interviews at this event. Instead, like at other events, I collected political literature that was being offered at the various stands and took notes on the speeches that were given by congressional candidates such as J.D. Hayworth who campaigned against Arizona Senator and former presidential candidate John McCain. As with the RightOnline conferences, these Tea Party events were promising locations for finding not only potential viewers of Fox News, but also the kind of Fox News viewers that are likely to be—due to their commitment to political activism—opinion leaders in their own interpersonal social networks.¹⁷⁵ For this reason, at this event and subsequent Tea Party events that I attended in 2011, I attempted to gather audience information about Fox News. Though I convinced a few Tea Party activists to do extended interviews, by and large I was unsuccessful at convincing a significant amount of Tea Party activists to participate in extended interviews about Fox News. However, while many people declined to do long, on-the-record interviews, in numerous cases the participants I asked would break into an informal discussion and elaborate on their views about the news media and about which news sources they preferred and why they preferred Fox News. The Tea Party event at Prescott Park in El Cajon, California on May 21, 2011 was an especially fruitful event. There I was introduced to a whole range of rank-and-file

¹⁷⁵ My hunch that Tea Party events would be prime locations for finding Fox News viewers is supported by a poll taken in April 2010 that showed, “63% of Tea Party supporters watched Fox News, compared to 11% of the all respondents” (Skocpol and Williamson, 2012, p. 135).

participants sitting in the their lawn chairs. As well, it was this event that I met congressional Tea Party candidate who I was able to do an extended interview with at a later date. As well, I met a talk radio host at this event who I also ended up interviewing at later date. In addition, I had an informative discussion with another local talk radio host about why he thought liberal talk radio has largely failed.

I do not mention this fieldwork to suggest that it stands as proof of my interpretations of Fox News programming. Rather, I stress how this secondary research functioned as a guiding device and safeguard against allowing my analysis to veer toward idiosyncratic, overly impressionistic interpretations that have no or little recursive connection with other sites for the production of conservative discourse in the conservative movement. Because the discourses and representational practices used at these events and mentioned interviews consistently mirrored those I found on Fox News, this secondary research, at each step of the way, renewed my confidence in the textual arguments I was developing and advancing about Fox News.

This project and any project on Fox News would be greatly enriched by audience ethnographies, surveys and other audience-based methods. There has been very little audience research done on Fox News and this is unfortunate because textual analyses of Fox News like the one I employ in this project would benefit immensely from what could be learned about how Fox News viewers use and interpret Fox News programming. In the future, I plan to test and supplement the research conducted in this dissertation with more extensive, in depth and systematic audience research. However, by capturing how Fox News programming operates as a complex cultural text and representational system and by historically contextualizing the key discourses Fox News

deploys, I feel this dissertation contributes to a greater understanding of why Fox News is popular and politically effective.

Appendix Two: The Programs

I chose to primarily focus on the Fox News's top opinion shows as opposed to the straight news programming because opinion programming takes up a larger portion of the network's 24-hour programming schedule (15 hours of opinion vs. 9 hours of news) and occurs during the optimal viewing hours (e.g. morning and late-evening). But more importantly, I privileged this programs over their news programs because the journalistic style of Fox News's top opinion programs contributes the most to the network's brand identity and has been the most crucial in the network's success and ability to distinguish itself in the television news market (Auletta 2003, Collins 2004).¹⁷⁶

In terms of the specific opinion programs I selected, I have several reasons for choosing them. First, these three programs were ranked—in terms of ratings—as the top three cable news programs on Fox News during 2009 and 2010 (and in cable news overall) with *The O'Reilly Factor* ranking first with 3 million viewers per night and *Hannity* ranking second with just over 2 million viewers and Beck ranking third with just under 2 million (Shea, 2009a, 2009b; Krakauer, 2010). Second, as sources of political discourse, no other hosts on Fox News come close to matching the reach and scope of Glenn Beck, Sean Hannity, and Bill O'Reilly. Each of these Fox News personalities has published numerous books that consistently have made the *New York Times Best Seller List*. Each has lucrative careers as public speakers often speaking at the most elite conservative political conferences and organizations such as CPAC and the National Rifle Association. Most impressive, each of these men have had, for years, successful radio programs with audiences that approximate the massive audience size of

¹⁷⁶See also (Stelter, 2009).

conservative talk radio king Rush Limbaugh.¹⁷⁷ During 2009, Hannity and Beck had the number two and number three top rated programs in radio, only topped by Limbaugh. As expected, in the varied media sites these men participate in, they perform the same working-class public persona and deploy similar discursive frames and interpretations that they use on Fox News. Moreover, it is common that they use their radio shows during the day as a testing ground for the material they use on their Fox News programs. In short, I chose these three programs because the discourse and public persona of these particular hosts have a much wider circulation in the broader conservative media establishment and political culture overall than with other hosts and programs on Fox News.

It is important to note the Glenn Beck's show, unlike Hannity and O'Reilly, aired in the 5PM time slot and not during primetime. *On the Record w/ Greta Van Susteren* is the other primetime program that follows O'Reilly and Hannity. I chose to look at Beck over Van Susteren's program for the reasons stated above and because Beck was far more deeply involved in the rise of the Tea Party and Beck was arguably the most notable cultural figure of the Recession era overall (Skocpol 2012).¹⁷⁸ In turn, the launching of Beck's program on Fox News in late-January of 2009 is especially notable because Beck lifted Fox News's overall ratings as a network significantly and amazingly rose to the top third spot in cable news in less than two months, and this in the exact

¹⁷⁷ In 2010, Sean Hannity's radio program reported over 14 million listeners a week, while Glenn Beck's radio program reported over 9 million (Ho, 2010). Having long ranked as one of the top programs in talk radio, O'Reilly and the *Radio Factor* went off air in February of 2009. O'Reilly maintained that his workload between television and radio was too overwhelming.

¹⁷⁸ In their recent book on the Tea Party, Vanessa Williamson and Theda Skocpol (2012) discuss the special role that Glenn Beck played in the development of the Tea Party. In their book, they particular discuss Beck's *9/12 Project*, a political organization that Beck founded and promoted from his first days on Fox News (pp. 133-134).

same months during the stimulus debate and Tea Party period in early-to-mid 2009.¹⁷⁹

One of the major downsides to not looking Van Susteren's program is that her show stands as a rare example of a Fox News program that is hosted by a woman. The lack of female hosts on Fox News, itself, speaks volumes about the patriarchal quality of Fox News's programming. However, this fact doesn't distinguish Fox News in relation to other television news networks that by and large also have program line ups that are overwhelming hosted by male anchors. If one is interested in the way Fox News's incorporates gender into its populist representational framework, Van Susteren's professional, lawyerly style of address is problematic as an example. In light of the style that many of the reoccurring female pundits and commentators exhibit, Van Susteren's on-air persona it is not representative of the way in which female analysts on Fox News use a populist mode of address and perform a working-class cultural disposition. Coming from CNN and working previously as a legal analyst, Susteren's style is an outlier in Fox News's overall representational strategy. Her on-air persona is more defined by her performance as a non non-sense reporter and former lawyer and law professor.

This doesn't mean however that Van Susteren's program did not assert the same economic interpretation of the Great Recession as one advanced by other hosts on Fox News. While Van Susteren's mode of address is more professional and while she is marketed as a moderate voice, she still generally asserts the same conservative political arguments as her fellow Fox News hosts. While O'Reilly may simply say, Obama's economic agenda is going to ruin the economy, Van Susteren, performing a professional

¹⁷⁹ For example, in comparison to its 2008 viewership numbers, in 2009 Beck grew the ratings of the 5PM time slot on Fox News an astounding 120% (Ariens, 2009).

journalistic stance, will express this same idea as a open question: Will Obama's economic agenda ruin the economy? And usually, her predominantly conservative guests will answer these nearly rhetorical questions in the affirmative. More to the point, Van Susteren's on-air persona does not represent the type of gendered performances that one sees other reoccurring woman analysts on Fox News display. The majority of the self-identified conservative female commentators on Fox News more clearly reinforce the overall populist representational strategy of the network in that they perform Fox News's construction a working-class cultural disposition but in a gendered fashion. Exemplified by female stars in the conservative media world such as Sara Palin, Ann Coulter and Laura Ingraham—all regular Fox News contributors—the feminized populist address that female analysts deploy on Fox News is often characterized by a vixen-like physical appearance and style of dress, an even more pugnacious attitude and a more daring “mouthiness” than their male counterparts and, especially, a greater tendency to use emasculating rhetoric when addressing or describing the liberal opposition than their male counterparts on Fox.¹⁸⁰ The key quality of Fox News's construction of the feminine working-class cultural disposition is how, to significant degree, is defined in masculine terms. This makes sense seeing that Fox News's overall representation of the working-class identity implicitly has ties to the culture and imagery of blue-collar workers, that is, workers in manufacturing, construction, defense and police, etc...i.e. those who do manly labor. The visibility of this manly working-class image on Fox News is matched by

¹⁸⁰ To build off of the Bourdieuan class model this dissertation significantly draws upon, there has been promising work that has applied Bourdieu's concept of “habitus” and cultural disposition to race and gendered identities (McCall, 1992; Gandara, 1995; MacLeod, 1995). Particularly apt for exploring how the archetype of the conservative female vixen operates in the cultural economy of Fox News, research done by Dorothy Holland and Margaret Eisenhart (1990) and Beverley Skeggs (1997) have respectively conceptualized a woman's sexual attractiveness as a type of cultural capital.

the invisibility of the greater portion of the workforce, which exists in the more feminized service sector and information economy.

In his book *The Politics of Identity* (1992), Stanley Aronowitz offers a way to interpret how constructions of the working-class identity are gendered in television program with his concept of *displacement*. Aronowitz argues that in popular television programming in the United States the working-class is often represented in a *displaced* manner through other identities such as race and gender. Aronowitz points to the way in which many of the most popular television shows in the 1980s such as *Miami Vice*, *Hill Street Blues*, and *L.A. Law* depicted the working-class as first and foremost a masculine identity which is often represented by detective and cop characters. Aronowitz argues that in 1980s sitcoms cops represent a residual image of the industrial workforce of early-twentieth-century. This residual image has its roots in the New Deal coalition's representation of the industrial workforce and the predominantly male membership of the labor movement. Paula Rabinowitz writes, "During the 1930s class struggle in the United States was metaphorically engendered through a discourse that represented class conflict through the language of sexual difference (1991, p. 8). In the post-industrial economy, however, the industrial workforce has been diminished, de-unionized, and fragmented and thus Aronowitz maintains (1992) that working-class identity often appears on television in the form of occupations associated with the military and the police force. In turn, he notes that a common story line one finds in popular 1980s television programs is that often the masculinized working-class protagonist becomes romantically involved with a delicate, female character that comes from the upper class. The female character's class status, like the cop characters, is read through their gender, but in the case of the upper class characters, this class

identity is marked by a hyper-femininity (pp. 193-208).

However, the predominant gendered performance displayed by the female stars of the conservative media world and by female pundits on Fox News, complicates Aronowitz's displacement argument. Because Fox News programming aims to sear the image of the working-class with political conservatism, female pundits expressing the beliefs and culture of conservatism do *not* perform a professional class, Victorian brand of femininity and instead define their femininity in relations to the cultural standards of working-class taste. Fox News's representation of this taste culture undeniably has a masculine edge and, leaving the argument here, one could say that Aronowitz's theory of displacement holds true by the logic that, in conservative partisan culture, the woman must act like men to exhibit working-class cultural disposition and therefore, working-classness is still displaced as masculinity. However, one has to be careful when determining what is in fact "masculine" about Fox News's representation of a working-class disposition. The performance of a working-class cultural disposition that Fox News contributors like Sarah Palin perform may in fact resonate with working-class women on a class level. In other words, working-class woman may identify with the combative style and irreverent tone of conservative women pundits on Fox News not only because men like these qualities but because it stands in contrast to the professional class model of femininity that most mainstream female journalists and anchors exhibit. On one hand, the populist style and the working-class cultural disposition that is performed on Fox News has a masculine orientation. On the other hand, Fox News the working-class cultural disposition is not exclusive to males as Aronowitz's analysis of 1980s television is. Instead, the working-class cultural disposition and populist political style is regularly shared by both male and female conservative pundits. While this programming feature

does not disprove Aronowitz's concept of displacement and his class-gender model, it definitely complicates it.

The intersection between gender, class, and conservatism in Fox News programming is highly complex and warrants far more attention than it receives in this dissertation. I have many more things to say about this intersection but I need to conduct more research in this area and develop a more thorough theoretical framework for analyzing how gender operates in Fox News's representational system. Rather than analyzing Van Susteren's program, in the future I would like to analyze episodes of *The O'Reilly Factor* when Laura Ingraham guest-hosts, which she does regularly. Ingraham has a successful talk radio program and exudes a much more populist presentational style than Van Susteren. What does it mean that the principal substitute host *The O'Reilly Factor* uses is a woman? How does Ingraham's gender change the populist representational system of *The Factor*, how does Ingraham's femininity adapt to it or contradict it?

Programming Distinctions

Among Fox News's top three shows, there are many significant differences. For example, O'Reilly tends to be more concerned with and reflexive about presenting himself as a legitimate journalist and as independent from the Republican Party (but not conservative political beliefs). Unlike Beck or Hannity, O'Reilly more avidly defends the professional integrity of his show in relation to the standards of traditional journalism.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ In contrast, both Beck and Hannity have little to no misgivings about assuming the role of political activist and using their programs to promote political events and organizations, organizations that they often lead. For example, Glenn Beck's *9/12 Project* was a key political organization in the Tea Party movement and was heavily promoted on his Fox News program. Like Beck, Hannity broadcasted his show from a Tea Party rally on April 15, 2009. However, he

O'Reilly professed commitment to journalistic values is part of the reason that he was the only one of Fox News's top three hosts to not broadcast from a rally location on the national Tea Party protest day. In general O'Reilly is the least likely to use his show to explicitly engage in political activism, even though he is the most likely to call for boycotts against companies affiliated with his political enemies. O'Reilly's greater identification with professional journalism reflects his career background as a television anchor on the newsmagazine program *Inside Edition* and, earlier, as a reporter and anchor for local television stations and small newspapers. In addition, among the three, O'Reilly tends to have the most moderate views in terms conservative economic philosophy. As I'll demonstrate throughout the dissertation, there were times in Fox News's Recession coverage where O'Reilly took anti-corporate and pro-regulation economic positions. Lastly, *The O'Reilly Factor* tends to tow closer to the format of traditional television news. The majority of the show consists of a mid-shot of O'Reilly using a direct address and mostly includes structured, one-on-one interviews as opposed to the larger, more freewheeling, roundtable discussions one finds on *Hannity* and *Glenn Beck*.

Both *Hannity* and *Beck* began their careers in talk radio and, therefore, journalistic discourses, while present, have a less central role in their respective programs. Of the three, *Hannity* most readily identifies as a Republican and follows the party line at any given moment in a fairly lockstep manner. In terms of presentational style, the music, program graphics and visual aesthetic of *Hannity* goes the furthest to

has conducted episodes at other protest events concerning other issues. For example, on September 17th, 2009, Sean Hannity broadcasted his show at a rally to protest the California state government's decision to shut down the water for areas of farmland in the San Joaquin Valley (which was done in the name of protecting the minnow population). On August 28th, 2010, Glenn Beck held his religious themed Restoring Honor Rally at the Lincoln Memorial on the Washington Mall were give or take a hundred thousand attended.

express a blue-collar cultural sensibility, as I elaborate in chapter two.

If O'Reilly presents himself as a moderate, independent thinker and tends to use discourses of journalistic professionalism to reinforce this image and if Hannity presents himself as a party loyalist and the one most in tune with the workingman's taste, Glenn Beck's distinguishing characteristic is that he is more invested in performing ideological purity and often takes positions from the right of the Republican Party and his Fox News colleagues in order to demonstrate this. Identifying as a libertarian and not a Republican, during the Recession coverage Beck took positions O'Reilly and Hannity would not take. In interview segments where O'Reilly had Beck on his program (for cross-promotional purposes), O'Reilly butted heads with Beck on range of issues. For example, O'Reilly frequently opposed Beck on his calls to abolish regulatory agencies particularly concerning Wall Street, he opposed Beck's argument that the banks should have been allowed to fail and that the Defense Department's budget needs to be cut (positions so libertarian, they resembles leftwing positions). In terms of format, Beck's program, as one local talk radio host that I interviewed described it, was "radio on television" meaning it had a closer resemblance to the free flowing quality of talk radio than the rapid and tight segment structure of television news (personal communication, . This is evident when one visually compares the broadcast transcripts of *Hannity* and *The Factor* to the transcripts of Beck's program. With the prior programs one sees a give and take, a sentence from the host, a break, and then a sentence from the guest, and on and on. When one looks at a transcript of *Glenn Beck*, one finds long, continuous blocks of speech, usually from Glenn Beck. Another unique quality of Beck's program is its greater popular educational focus and inclusion of academic books by conservative intellectuals, something I discuss in greater detail in chapter five. Rivaling the Oprah

Winfrey Show's promotional ability, during the Great Recession Glenn Beck's program brought several conservative intellectual books out from utter obscurity into national best sellers, the Mormon intellectual Cleon Skousen's book *The Five Thousand Year Leap* being the most notable example.

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