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**Race, Religion, and Politics, Then and Now:
The Copperheads and the Tea Party**

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I. Introduction

There was a time in American political history when Democrats and Republicans were at significant, polarizing odds. Both sides saw the other as a threat to the US Constitution. Both had major media outlets that trumpeted their positions and demonized the other. Both were concerned about race in America, and were deeply distressed about (and invested in) the use of race in politics. The US President was understood as favoring some people on the basis of their race and of ignoring the US Constitution. Religious leaders involved themselves in the public

debate, taking one side or the other, and both sides accused the other, at various moments, of being on the side of the devil.

This was a moment of great economic difficulty for many, and various economically-stressed groups began to blame other groups in like difficulty for their financial woes. Much of this anger was felt and enacted across racial boundaries. Tension between groups at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder served as a good distraction from other things about which people and institutions at higher levels sought to avoid public discussion.

Extremist groups arose on both sides, increasing the temperature and passion of public discourse, encouraging and sometimes taking part in violent acts, and often being (at times accurately) accused of slander. The nation was understood by both sides to be in grave danger, and it was clear to each that the other side had placed the country in peril. The country was seriously divided, with both sides convinced of the evil intent of the other's motives, and very little movement off dead-center seemed possible.

Although this description has much in common with our own era, these paragraphs describe the era leading up to, during, and for some time after the US Civil War. Republicans generally stood in support of the war and of Lincoln's policies, at least in public, and many Republicans saw non-support of the war as treasonous. Many Democrats saw the war as bad policy, and often understood Lincoln and his policies as dangerous. The suspension of habeas corpus, the draft, and wartime labor practices were high on the list of policies many Democrats deemed unconstitutional, leading to frequent accusations that Lincoln was a traitor to the US. This feeling was made more complex and deep by the enacting of the Emancipation

Proclamation, which, apart from the thoroughgoing impact on human freedom of the act, also produced economic shockwaves. Many Democrats became convinced that freeing the slaves, and not saving the Union, was the agenda behind the war. This served to exacerbate and make more complex long-simmering racial tensions in the north. Some Democrats, including some well-known public figures, joined a popular movement against the war, called the “Copperheads”. The Copperheads came to be known for their anti-Lincoln, anti-war, and racially divisive rhetoric.

In our time, Republicans and Democrats are at polar odds again, rivaling if not going beyond the polarization of the Civil War period. The citizenry is in a like way polarized, assisted by media outlets that have largely aligned themselves with the perspectives of one party or the other. During the Civil War, Americans read political pamphlets explaining the position of one or the other side, and the choice of pamphlet marked their position. Today, the choices one makes in internet, cable TV, and talk radio programming are a clear marker of which side one supports. The Tea Party in our time plays some of the role that the Copperhead movement did in the 1860’s, standing against the sitting president and his party and encouraging resistance.

In this article, I compare and contrast the Copperheads of the mid-1860s and the Tea Party of the early years of the 21st century. I explore the movements’ arising, issues impacting and impacted by their emergence, and the meaning and influence of each, particularly on race and religion. I identify learnings and suggest continuing questions for reflection on political movements informed by understandings of and approaches to race, and the kind of intermingling of theology and ideology commonly-seen in times of crisis.

II. The Copperheads

On January 14, 1863, Rep. Clement Vallandigham of Ohio made a speech on the floor of the US House of Representatives. In part, he recounted,

Soon after the war began the reign of the mob was supplanted by the iron domination of arbitrary power. Constitutional limitation was broken down; habeas corpus fell; liberty of the press, of speech, of the person, of the mails, of travel, of one's own house, and of religion; the right to bear arms, due process of law, judicial trial, trial by jury, trial at all; every badge and monument of freedom in republican government or kingly government all went down at a blow; and the chief law-officer of the crown (I beg pardon, sir, but it is easy now to fall into this courtly language), the Attorney-General, first of all men, proclaimed in the United States the maxim of Roman servility: Whatever pleases the President, that is law! Prisoners of state were then first heard of here. Midnight and arbitrary arrests commenced; travel was interdicted; trade embargoed; passports demanded; bastiles were introduced; strange oaths invented; a secret police organized; "piping" began; informers multiplied; spies now first appeared in America. The right to declare war, to raise and support armies, and to provide and maintain a navy, was usurped by the Executive.¹

Vallandigham outlined in this famous speech some of the key points of Copperhead thought. Rep. Vallandigham was a Democrat from the North. Ohio was a Union state, which included in its population many Confederate sympathizers. Vallandigham spoke for many in decrying what he understood as abuses of liberty during wartime. The "arbitrary power" of the

¹ Clement Vallandigham, "On the War and Its Conduct," *Speeches, Arguments and Letters* (New York: J. Walter and Company, 1864), 418-437.

executive, the suspension of habeas corpus² and various other freedoms, the institution of the draft and increased policing of citizens – all these played a role in the growing unease with the progress of the war.

The Copperheads were named by Republicans for the poisonous snake who struck without warning. Some members of the movement found a positive meaning in the use of the term and came to use it as well, proudly wearing the Liberty head cut from a copper penny to signify their allegiance to their understanding of freedom. The Copperheads were also known as “Peace Democrats”, because of their lack of support of the goals of the Civil War.³ The Copperhead movement was strong in the Midwestern states of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, although significant parts of the movement arose elsewhere, including a number of large northeastern cities.

The financial backing for the Copperheads as a movement is hard to trace. Funding did come into the major Copperhead/Peace Democrat pamphlet publishing concern, the Society for the Diffusion of Political Knowledge. Organized in 1863 in New York by Democratic leaders, they produced many pamphlets throughout the war period and for a few years afterwards. The sentiments expressed were invariably against the war, against Lincoln, for reconciliation with the

² *Habeas corpus*, which prohibits government from arresting citizens without reasonable cause, had been suspended in the early days of the war, for anyone traveling between Washington and Philadelphia suspected of subversive acts or speech. Later, a more general suspension was declared. This was particularly offensive to many Democrats, many of whom were at least sympathetic with the aims of the Copperhead movement, whether or not they formally joined. See “The American Civil War: Habeas Corpus” at <http://www.etymonline.com/cw/habeas.htm>; Abraham Lincoln, “Proclamation Suspending the Writ of Habeas Corpus”, at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=425>.

³ Delores Archaimbault and Terry Barnhart, “Illinois Democrats and the American Civil War”, at <http://www.lib.niu.edu/1996/iht319615.html>.

Confederacy, which would be accepted as a separate nation, in support of slavery, and many were rabidly racist. Democratic money flowed into the Society and into major newspapers supportive of Copperhead aims.⁴ Money also was collected and used by major Copperhead “chapters” or voluntary organizations. Some of these gathered members from multiple states; others were more local in scope. The names chosen for these organizations hearkened back to the US Revolutionary War period, or farther still, to the era of chivalry and knighthood. The Knights of the Golden Circle, the Sons of Liberty, and the Order of American Knights were prominent among the Copperhead organizations formed.⁵

The Copperheads were a strange mix, a loosely-connected amalgam of people and organizations who were in some ways like-minded and who shared some of the same goals. Three key points that unified many under the Copperhead or Peace Democrat banner are explored here.

II. a. Economic stress

Grain has gone down till it won't pay hauling charges. So much for electing a man – the exponent of Personal Liberty Bills, N***** Suffrage and Equality, Beecherism,

⁴⁴ Among others, some of the most influential papers that spoke for the Peace Democrat/Copperhead cause included the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, the *Chicago Times*, the *Dubuque (Iowa) Herald*, the *Mason (Ohio) Democrat*, the *Bucyrus (Ohio) Forum*, the *LaCrosse (Wisconsin) Democrat*, the *Detroit Free Press*, and the *Columbus Crisis*.

⁵ Cf. Frank Klement, *The Copperheads in the Middle West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 134-169; Mark Wahlgren Summers, *A Dangerous Stir: Fear, Paranoia, and the Making of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 32-47.

Stoweism, N*****ism, and a dozen isms and tomfooleries upon which the entire North under the lead of Aboilitionized Massachusetts has gone mad.⁶

The Civil War was an economic boon for the Union in many ways. But for many in the rural midwest, the period was a time of financial trouble. This resulted from a number of factors. The Mississippi River was blockaded in order to stop troop and armament movement. This led to an economic depression in 1861-62, that particularly impacted the upper Midwest. The loss of markets in the south depressed farm prices; corn dropped to less than ten cents per bushel, and hog prices dropped by half. Unemployment rates grew precipitously.⁷ Additionally, the paper money issued by many Midwestern banks was based on Southern bonds, which became inaccessible after the battle of Fort Sumter. These all contributed to a sense shared by many in the Midwest that the war was not worth the harm being done the economy.

This feeling was shared by some in urban areas as well. Taxes were raised to pay for the war, especially burdening those who worked for an hourly wage.⁸ The War was particularly difficult for hourly workers, as salaries did not rise with the precipitously rising cost of living.⁹ The institution of the draft, and the option of paying one's way out of the draft, meant that low-

⁶ Editorial in *The Dubuque Herald*, Nov.23, 1861, (Dubuque, IA) by Dennis Mahoney, editor. When the writ of habeas corpus was suspended, Mahoney was arrested, transported to Washington, D.C., and there imprisoned for four months without charge. He was freed when he agreed not to prosecute those who arrested and held him. Quoted in Frank Klement, *Lincoln's Critics: The Copperheads of the North* (Shippensburg, PA: White Maine Books, 1999), 95.

⁷ Klement, 1960; 3.

⁸ Philip Paludan, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1994) 212.

⁹ Klement, 1960, 32-35.

income citizens went to war in higher numbers than those with means. This increased tensions between socioeconomic classes, and encouraged support of Copperhead sentiments.

II. b. Race

Long before the Civil War, Alexis de Tocqueville observed that “Race prejudice seems stronger in those states that have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists, and nowhere is it more intolerant than in those states where it was never known.”¹⁰ Northern racism played a central role in the emergence and growth of the Copperhead movement. A review of newspapers and pamphlets of the time demonstrates this. At a time when it was much more acceptable to openly caricature Africans and African-Americans, references to all interactions with African-Americans as “repulsive to the white man’s instincts”¹¹ were not uncommon. Picturing Lincoln as African-American became a common ploy among some cartoonists and pamphlet artists.¹²

Race tension also arose in response to the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation, which became a particular sore point and rallying cry for Copperheads and those sympathetic to the movement. The Proclamation was actually issued in two stages – one that warned that the

¹⁰ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, transl. Gerald Bevan (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003; originally published 1835), 343.

¹¹ *The Irish-American and Leader*, New York, New York; July 12, 1863.

¹² The cover of the *The Lincoln Catechism, wherein the Eccentricities and Beauties of Despotism are Fully Set Forth* pictures Lincoln as African and with devil horns. Feidel, ed., 1967; pamphlet cover, front papers; text, vol. II, 981-1015. The cover of *Abraham Africanus I: His Secret Life as revealed under the Mesmeric Influence, and Mysteries of the White House* pictures Lincoln as an African monarch; see at “Copperheads (politics)”, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copperheads_\(politics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copperheads_(politics)). Both of these pamphlets were published by J.F. Feeks, a New York city pamphleteer aligned with the Copperheads.

second would take place if those states to which it applied did not return to Union control.¹³

While some Republicans and many abolitionists criticized the acts because they only applied to the states over which Lincoln had little influence, for Copperheads and those sympathetic to them, in the Proclamation, one of their greatest fears was realized. When the Proclamation was issued, attacks on the President and the administration from the Copperheads greatly increased. It is not coincidental that Vallandigham's speech was delivered in January, 1863, the same month the Proclamation was issued.

Racial politics played a role in the public perception in many communities of the institution of the draft as well. Once the Emancipation Proclamation came down, support for the war effort waned considerably among some groups. In New York City, Irish longshoremen went on strike in a bid for higher wages. Their employers fired them and hired African-Americans, who took the jobs for lower rates of pay. When the draft began, the conscription of many of these unemployed longshoremen, who now were pressed to fight for the freedom of the African-Americans with whom they were competing for jobs, much increased the temperature of the debate.¹⁴

II. c. Religion

Religious leaders on both sides, Democrat and Republican, took active roles in speaking into and about the multiple crises of the Civil War. For many years before the war began, many

¹³ See "The Emancipation Proclamation", http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/.

¹⁴ John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1969), 278-279.

preachers, theologians and church leaders were active abolitionists. Evangelical preacher Charles Finney; Presbyterian pastor Lyman Beecher and his daughter, author Harriet Beecher Stowe; and journalist William Lloyd Garrison were among the leading lights of a large group of people who professed and advocated for abolition on religious grounds. More generally, a number of preachers who encouraged support of the Union cause from the pulpit; Edward Everett Hale, pastor of South Congregational Church in Boston, was among these.¹⁵

The Society for the Diffusion of Political Knowledge also published religious pamphlets supportive of the Copperhead approach. One of these, termed by commentators as “curious,” is by John Henry Hopkins, first Protestant Episcopal Bishop of Vermont. The pamphlet, entitled “Bible View of Slavery,” argues that the Bible did not abolish nor prohibit slavery, but does state Hopkins’ view that abolition was urgently important.¹⁶ However, support for abolition was not stressed in the article; this may be why the Society took it up for publication as a Copperhead/Democrat piece.

The major religious factor in the Copperhead movement, however, was ethnic Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholics were influenced, no doubt, by many years of prejudicial treatment in the US, particularly at the hands of members of the Know Nothings, a nativist political party that became prominent in the 1840s and 1850s. The Know Nothings were both a political party and something of a secret society – when asked their beliefs, members were to state “I know nothing.” They strongly opposed immigration and openly stated their sense that if Roman Catholics were allowed to vote, there would be a Roman Catholic takeover of the US,

¹⁵ Edward Everett Hale, “The Desert and the Promised Land: A Sermon”, in Freidel, ed., 1967, 503-524.

¹⁶ Freidel, ed., 1967, 658-687.

which would result in America being placed under the rule of the Pope.¹⁷ At base, fear of competition for jobs played a significant role in tensions between new, Roman Catholic immigrants and Protestant immigrants whose families had been in the US for a few generations. Millard Fillmore ran for President on the Know Nothing ticket in 1856 but lost; the party faded after this, and many Know Nothings joined the Republican Party.¹⁸ A number of other prominent Know Nothings became powerful Republicans; Salmon P. Chase, who served in the US Senate from Ohio and eventually served as Lincoln's Treasury Secretary and as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, was one of these.¹⁹

The sight of many Know Nothings in the Republican Party did not endear Roman Catholics to their cause, nor did the regular appearance of attacks on Catholics in Republican newspapers. Two Republican newspapers in Dubuque, Iowa, commonly ran anti-Catholic articles and editorials. Jesse Clement, editor of the *Dubuque Daily Times*, once was an active Know Nothing who joined the Republican Party before the War. His attacks on Catholics were legendary, as were those of the editor of the *Dubuque Union*, Rev. Billingsgate Smith.²⁰ Republicanism was in no position to attract Roman Catholics during the War.

¹⁷ Ohio History Central, "The American Party", <http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/entry.php?rec=838&nm=American-Party>.

¹⁸Teaching American History in Maryland, "The Know Nothings", <http://teachingamericanhistorymd.net/000001/000000/000065/html/t65.html>.

¹⁹ Klement, 1960, 31.

²⁰ Cf. editorial columns, *Dubuque Daily Times*, July 12, 1861; *Dubuque Union*, July 13, October 22, 1861.

Scholars have noted also the economic divide between many Republicans and many Roman Catholic immigrants. Republicans of the time noted it too, often ridiculing Roman Catholics in print and in speech. Republicans were more likely to be educated and to own land, and their attacks on Roman Catholics were often more based in class than in religion. Clearly, the divide between many Republicans and many Irish and German Roman Catholics, and the like divide between the Roman Catholic immigrants and free or newly-freed African-Americans, created class tensions that often boiled over into hatred, and at times, into violence. Prejudice based in class, socioeconomic status and religion encouraged many Roman Catholics into the Copperhead camp.²¹

I must also note the religious influence of theology/ideology being formed in the South. Many in the South saw the war as theological, a struggle between orthodox Christians (themselves) and godless, anti-Christian liberal abolitionists (northerners). This argument was largely formed within academic Southern Presbyterianism, with professors from Union Seminary in Richmond and Columbia Seminary in South Carolina leading the way. Documents produced argued that Confederate soldiers were more pious than their Union counterparts; that the South was “justified” and the North was not; that slavery was “a necessary good” for the “depraved lower classes”; and that secession was authorized by God, as the Bible authorized slavery and to

²¹ See Robert M. Sandow, *Deserter Country: Civil War Opposition in the Pennsylvania Appalachians* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 1-13.

work against it was to work against God.²² The erudite and intellectual output of theologians in the South undoubtedly impacted religious understandings in the North, particularly among Copperheads.

II. d. The Copperheads: Concluding Thoughts

A few conclusions can be drawn at this point.

The Copperheads responded in large part to actual injustice. Many civil rights violations occurred during the Civil War that modern citizens would deem shocking and worthy of protest. The suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, the wholesale arrest and detention for months without charge of anyone who had publicly criticized the administration (including many newspaper editors and some legislators), the loss of a variety of civil rights, and forced conscription – these and more flew in the face of the freedoms the War purported to protect and defend.

Prejudice was often linked to economic stress, which could generate and multiply.

The Know Nothings' public attacks on Roman Catholics referred to their religion and their culture. But at base, these attacks found their impetus in fear that new immigrants would compete for jobs. In due time, the new immigrant Roman Catholics turned around and did unto others as others had done to them – they attacked African-Americans on the basis of their skin

²² See Edward Sebesta and Euan Hague, "The US Civil War as a Theological War: Nationalism and the League of the South", in *Canadian Review of American Studies* vol. 32, no. 3 (2002), 253-283; and the writings of Robert Lewis Dabney, James Henley Thornwell, and Benjamin Morgan Palmer. Dabney taught at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, VA; Thornwell and Palmer, at Columbia Seminary in Columbia, SC. Columbia has since relocated to Decatur, GA.

color, history and background. At base, again, these attacks were based in fear of job competition from African-Americans. Both of these prejudicial phenomena had an impact on the rising and staying power of the Copperhead movement.

Racial hatred was a reality as well within the Copperhead movement. The rising tide of rage when the Emancipation Proclamation was enacted demonstrates substantial depth and breadth of racial prejudice at the time. Based in an understanding among Northerners in non-slave states that African-Americans were in fact inferior beings, and made more complex by the new competition in the labor market, the fact of racism as one impetus for the Copperheads is clear.

Religion was a factor. On all sides, religious leaders weighed in on the conflict and tried to influence events. The linkages between religion, race, prejudice, economic stress and economic privilege were deep and complex. Both the use and the abuse of power by religious leaders during the period can be identified. Clearly, the emergence and growth of the Copperhead movement was aided by religious belief and teaching.

III. The Tea Party

Sarah Palin, former Governor (R) of Alaska and US Vice Presidential Candidate, gave the keynote speech at the National Tea Party Convention in April 2010. Among the things she shared that night were the following:

I'm so proud to be an American...do you love your freedom? If you love your freedom, thank a vet...I am a big supporter of this movement. Got lots of friends and family in the lower 48 who attend these events...just knowing that this is the movement and that America is ready for another revolution...I look forward to speaking at more Tea Party

events in the near future. It is just so inspiring to see real people. Not politicians. Not inside the beltway professionals. Come out and stand up and speak out for common sense conservative principles.²³

In the first few moments of her speech, Palin sounded some of the key notes common to the various parts of the Tea Party Movement. Freedom, support of the military, preparing for revolution, members as “real people” in contrast with those who serve in Washington, and above all, talk of “common sense conservative principles” is heard at every Tea Party event and on every website.

The Tea Party movement takes its name from the Boston Tea Party of 1773, a protest in the American colony of Massachusetts in response to many acts of the British monarchy, especially the increased tax on the importation of tea. The modern-day Tea Party movement invokes images, slogans and themes from the pre-Revolutionary period in the US. Supporters of libertarian presidential candidate Ron Paul used the anniversary of the Boston Tea Party for a one-day fund-raising event on December 16th, 2007, promoted through the internet, called “Tea Party 07”. The promotional poster stated that “The New American Revolution has begun!” and “Liberty is Brewing”.²⁴ This fundraising effort is generally credited with the original catalyst for the movement, but growth of the movement beyond this event did not pick up until early 2009.

Research into and commentary on the Tea Party is ongoing from a wide and diverse variety of angles. In this article, I limit my examination to the three issues paralleling those explored for the Copperhead movement: economics, race and religion.

²³ The Moderate Voice, <http://themoderatevoice.com/62060/sarah-palins-keynote-speech-at-national-tea-party-convention/>.

²⁴ See <http://mysite.verizon.net/nathanielyao/index.html>.

III.a. Economics

Significant and complex problems within the US economy, caused in large part by fiscal and regulatory policy, began in the middle of this decade. These have both deepened and worsened, extending now to a global crisis. The economic crisis and the response of the Obama administration, the US Senate and Congress to the crisis form much of the fertile ground from which the vast, loosely-connected network called the Tea Party has grown. This crisis is serious and real. In this article, I limit my exploration to the ways the Tea Party has responded and called others to respond to the crisis.

Many US citizens are economically stressed today in ways most of them can't identify with anything in living memory. A June 2010 Pew Research Center report entitled "How the Great Recession has Changed Life in America: A Balance Sheet at 30 Months"²⁵ offers detailed data about that stress. The report states that over the last 3 years, more than half of all workers have experienced a spell of unemployment, taken a cut in pay or hours or been forced to go part-time. Typically, unemployed workers have looked for more than six months to find work. Around 20% of the wealth of the average household has been lost, through the collapse of stock and home prices. Almost 6/10 of all Americans have cancelled or shortened vacations, and around 1/5 say that they owe more on their mortgages than the house is now worth (rendering the houses "underwater," a term regularly heard now in media reports). The public anger of the Tea Party movement speaks into a situation that is grave and real for many in the US.

²⁵ Downloadable from the Pew Research Center article site, <http://pewsocialtrends.org/pubs/759/how-the-great-recession-has-changed-life-in-america>. Click on the pdf link for Complete Report.

However, results of an April 2010 CBS News/New York Times survey²⁶ indicate that 76% of respondents who identify with the Tea Party have a household income of \$50,000 or more; 20% reported their household income to be over \$100,000. It may be that the members of the Tea Party, and those who identify with the movement, are not as economically stressed as many US citizens. Yet the poll reports that a much larger number of people who identify with the Tea Party are angry (53%) than citizens in the general population did in April (19%). So – what is the source of the anger?

Poll respondents suggested a number of issues that made them angry, including the US health care reform package, government not representing the people, and government spending. While these are significant, none of these garnered even one fifth of respondents; the one issue reportedly causing the most anger (health care reform) was only stated by 16%.

What is more interesting is that 92% of respondents reported that “the country is on the wrong track” (compared with 59% of people in the general population at the time of the poll), and 88% disapproved of President Obama’s performance on the job. When asked what they didn’t like about Obama, 19% said they just didn’t like him. Most respondents felt that those running the country “do not share their values” and that they have lost something they used to have.²⁷

One economic reality about the Tea Party has become clear over the last two years. While the genesis of the movement has facets that have bubbled up from the grassroots – that is, who are ordinary citizens with little funding who have used the internet and social networking to

²⁶See http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20002529-503544.html and

²⁷See http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/18/weekinreview/18zernike.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all.

gather people around a common cause – much of the Tea Party, while clinging to their identity as those who speak for the people, is in fact very well-funded. This is clear from Tea Party marketing campaigns, use of media, and the ability of rallies and protests to bring on speakers who come with large price tags. Those who do “share the values” of Tea Party adherents (in contrast to those in Washington, according to the poll results discussed above) are at least as media and tech savvy as those inside the Beltway – and at times, able to put these forces to use much more effectively.

It will be interesting to see how the economic fortunes of those who self-identify with the Tea Party fare as the recession continues. Currently, while the country and many residents are certainly in trouble economically, the personal economic situation of Tea Partiers does not offer adequate evidence to support the anger shown at events and reported by supporters of the movement.²⁸

III. b. Race

The issue of race and feelings between people of different races, as these issues arise in discussion of the Tea Party, quickly become complex. A number of factors render this discussion problematic. The first is the lack of a scholarly “remove” we are afforded in discussing the Copperhead movement; the Tea Party is active now, not 150 years ago. Also, the racism in the Copperhead movement was blatant and open. It was an era when the belief that people from Africa were intrinsically inferior to people from Europe was normative for many US

²⁸ Many blog posts offer speculation as to other root causes of the anger shown by Tea Party supporters; I have chosen not to refer to these as data because of the nature of the posts.

citizens. Outside the abolitionist camp, openly racist statements were generally not challenged, and often not even seen as offensive. While racist speech can still be heard today, most politicians and scholars guard their tongues, knowing that a number of professionals have sustained damage to or lost their careers over reported bigoted statements. So accusations of racism have to be examined closely, and often, what looks racist to one person or group does not to others. Finally, scholars think carefully about conversations about racism, knowing how visceral and immediate the response will be. It is not acceptable in US society in 2010 to be thought of as racist – that is, while it might be deemed okay by some and within some communities to harbor racist attitudes, having others come to believe that one is racist can be damaging. Those who make this claim about others should be braced for attack. But race cannot be ignored in discussing the Tea Party. Here, I discuss some of the issues emerging from research.

While Ron Paul’s presidential campaign was evidently the first to use the term “Tea Party” in this period (in December 2007), that was in relationship to an anniversary of the Boston Tea Party of 1773. The term disappeared for a while from the record, and mentions of the Tea Party do not arise again until February 2009. From then on, they multiply in number, scope, and the news time given to them. The rising of the Tea Party one month after the first US African-American president was inaugurated cannot be viewed as coincidental. In that month, events later identified with the Tea Party began to take place, first in Seattle,²⁹ and then in Chicago,

²⁹ Kate Zernike, “Unlikely Activist Who Got to the Tea Party Early”, New York Times, February 28, 2010; <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/28/us/politics/28keli.html/>; Martin Kaste, “Tea Party Star Leads Movement on her own terms”, February 2, 2010; <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=123229743>.

where CNBC News Editor Rick Santelli went on a “rant” on camera from the Chicago Mercantile Exchange that went “viral” on the internet within a short time.³⁰ Many websites were opened in response to the protest in Seattle and Santelli’s broadcast from Chicago. One, a Facebook page, called for nationwide protests; this resulted in protests in 40 cities on February 27, 2009.³¹

The movement has grown from these beginnings to include perhaps 18-20% of US residents who self-identify with the Tea Party and take part in its activities. The exponential growth of this almost-exclusively white movement, the anger of the participants, and its appearance in the early days of the Obama administration call for examination concerning racism. Although President George W. Bush led the nation through the early days of the recession, including enacting legislation to bail out banks,³² the anger emerged almost simultaneously with Obama’s taking office, and has not been linked with the Bush administration or President Bush himself. Along with the high levels of polarization along political lines in the country, the main other difference between Presidents Bush and Obama is their race.

The issues of affirmative action and immigration are particularly troublesome to many Tea Party supporters. A May 2010 University of Washington poll asked almost 1700 adults their

³⁰ CNBC.com, “Rick Santelli’s Shout Heard ‘Round the World”, February 22, 2009; http://www.cnbc.com/id/29283701/Rick_Santelli_s_Shout_Heard_Round_the_World. Santelli spoke angrily about homeowners who had taken out home loans that they couldn’t afford, blaming them for the cost that other Americans would have to pay if homeowners at risk of losing their homes were “bailed out” by the government.

³¹ Glenn Beck, “Worst Case Scenario No. 3”, February 20, 2009; <http://video.foxnews.com/v/3924410/worst-case-scenario-no-3>.

³² NPR, “Bush to Unveil Bank Bailout Details”, October 13, 2008; <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=95679876>.

opinions on a number of issues, seeking information on attitudes within the Tea Party on race and immigration.³³ Early questions in the poll sought to understand the depth of support for the Tea Party among respondents. Among respondents who support the Tea Party to a significant degree, 74% do not support government assistance to ensure equal rights for minorities, and 88% approve of the controversial new immigration law in Arizona. These sentiments were echoed by Senator James Webb (D, Virginia) in a Wall Street Journal op-ed contribution he offered in July 2010.³⁴ In the wake of charges of racism between the NAACP and the Tea Party, Senator Webb argued that affirmative action is no longer needed; in fact, it is harming the US and whites are now the victims of racism because of it. Webb also addressed immigration and denounced government programs that assist immigrants, a position that resonates with Tea Party beliefs on immigration.

There are a number of stories of blatant racial slurs being made during Tea Party rallies and protest gatherings. Pictures of President Obama as Hitler or Lenin, statements that Allah is a “Monkey God,” and reports of racially-charged derogatory terms for African-Americans and Hispanic/Latino/a persons have been reported. A Google Images search of “racist Tea Party signs” pulls up hundreds of images, some of which are really shocking. Further, some stories of actual assault have been reported. (The CBS/New York Times poll referenced above reported that 24% of those surveyed thought that violent action against the government was sometimes justified.) The NAACP passed a resolution at its national meeting in July 2010, asking the Tea

³³ University of Washington Institute for the Study of Ethnicity, Race and Sexuality, May 2010; http://www.washingtonpoll.org/results/June1_teparty.pdf.

³⁴ “Diversity and the Myth of White Privilege”, July 23, 2010; http://online.wsj.com/article/NA_WSJ_PUB:SB10001424052748703724104575379630952309408.html.

Party Movement to repudiate racist elements within the movement.³⁵ The response of Tea Party leaders was swift; the NAACP was accused of “overstepping their bounds”, of “being out of touch” with the American people, and of “playing the race card” and “race-baiting”.³⁶ Charges of racism within the ranks of the Tea Party are not likely to be accepted.

Finally, the issue of race and racism within the Tea Party movement comes back to one of their key rallying cries – “I want my country back”, “Take our country back”, or “Get our Country Back on the Right Track”. Sarah Palin has released a video that looks suspiciously like a presidential campaign piece.³⁷ She uses this language in the video, a heavily produced, studied marketing approach to the campaign and to people who are listening to Tea Party messages and supportive of its agenda. Very few non-white faces appear in this piece. Most of the women who do appear are identified, by Palin’s voiceover, as “mothers,” “grandmothers,” and people who are concerned for “our kids” – the video is entitled “Mama Grizzlies”. The message is understated but still clear – Palin is speaking to those who will “take their country back” – white people, who have “lost” it through the most recent presidential election. “Our country” is a white country. Study of power dynamics between races and between genders reveals the truth of white male privilege, in most societies in the world, including US society.³⁸ When a largely

³⁵ <http://www.naacp.org/press/entry/naacp-delegates-unanimously-pass-tea-party-amendment/>

³⁶ Andy Barr, “Tea Party to NAACP: Grow Up”, Politico.com, July 13, 2010, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0710/39673.html>.

³⁷ Andy Barr, “Sarah Palin puts out campaign-style video”, Politico.com, July 8, 2010, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0710/39488.html>.

³⁸ Two influential studies of white male privilege are Robert Jensen’s “White Privilege Shapes the US”, 1998, <http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~rjensen/freelance/whiteprivilege.htm>; and Peggy McIntosh’s “Unpacking the Invisible Backpack”, 1990, <http://www.case.edu/president/aaction/UnpackingTheKnapsack.pdf>.

white, male, economically stable group cries out that they want to “take their country back”, just as a Black man comes into the highest office of the land – the first Black man to hold that office – we must ask what has been lost, and who has taken it. They have not lost their white male privilege and power. I submit that the visceral response is to a sense of deep offense that someone who is not of their group – someone they “just don’t like” – someone who “doesn’t see America like you and I see America”³⁹ – someone who is different has some of that power now. President Obama’s race is part of the *raison d’être* of the Tea Party, and racist attitudes continue to live within it.

III. c. Religion

Religion, in the form of conservative, evangelical Christianity, plays a significant role in the Tea Party. Breakout sessions at the national convention featured evangelical pastors in leadership; Judge Roy Moore, former Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court who lost his position when he refused to remove a sculpture of the Ten Commandments from the court building, keynoted.⁴⁰ Sarah Palin’s convention speech included calls for Congress making “asking for divine intervention from God” a priority, and for elected representatives to “proclaim their allegiance to our Creator.”⁴¹

³⁹Said by Sarah Palin in an October 2007 interview; http://firstread.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2008/10/04/4436270-palin-attacks-obama-with-ayers.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Frum, “Getting Religion at the Tea Party Convention”, February 5, 2010; <http://www.frumforum.com/getting-religious-at-the-tea-party-convention>.

⁴¹ Michael Stone, “Religion: Tea Party Politics and the new Christocrats”, February 8, 2010; <http://www.examiner.com/humanist-in-portland/religion-tea-party-politics-and-the-new-christocrats>.

Many in the Tea Party and many Tea Party chapters find Islam particularly troublesome. Tea Party organizations have organized against the building of mosques, and meetings in a number of states have featured speeches and workshops that warn against the “Islamization of America”. Lt. Gov. Ron Ramsey of Tennessee, who ran for governor backed by the Tea Party, stated in July 2010 that he was against the institution of sharia law in Tennessee, and queried whether being a Muslim is actually a religion, suggesting that perhaps it is more of a nationality or a cult.⁴² A Facebook page has been set up by Tea Party representatives upset that Six Flags has a “Muslim Day”, and asking for a boycott of the parks.⁴³ Muslim groups, alarmed at the tone of some Tea Party speech, have responded with their own calls for boycotting Tea Party events where speakers known for anti-Muslim remarks are on the agenda.⁴⁴

Some commentators have commented on the intertwining of Mormon beliefs for some in the Tea Party. Glenn Beck, host of conservative television and radio shows and author,⁴⁵ is a Mormon and a supporter of the Tea Party. Joanna Brooks of Religion Dispatches states that for Mormons involved in the Tea Party, “...the Tea Party taps into a powerful and distinctive complex of Mormon beliefs about the divinity of the U.S. Constitution and the last-days role of

⁴² Charles Haynes, “Freedom of Religion: Is the Tea Party Movement Islamophobic?”, Daily Journal.com, August 3, 2010, <http://www.thedailyjournal.com/article/20100803/OPINION02/8030337/Freedom-of-religion-Is-the-tea-party-movement-Islamophobic->.

⁴³ Discussion on Six Flags Facebook page, <http://www.facebook.com/#!/topic.php?uid=8696281132&topic=16240>.

⁴⁴ Tom McLaughlin, “Muslim Group: Boycott Local Tea Party Event”, August 6, 2010; <http://www.nwfdailynews.com/articles/video-31705-party-group.html>

⁴⁵ www.glennbeck.com

righteous souls from the Rocky Mountains in saving it from destruction.”⁴⁶ Her understanding is shared by other commentators.⁴⁷ Sarah Palin, the premiere and most media-savvy Tea Party voice, made a point to speak in Nevada, an area important to the Mormon demographic,⁴⁸ and Mitt Romney, who is Mormon and a likely presidential candidate in 2012, now identifies himself as a “Tea Party Republican.”⁴⁹

The Mormon presence is significant enough within the Tea Party that some evangelical Christians, who would normally see Mormons as lost, are welcoming Mormons into the movement – while holding onto the disclaimer that Mormon theology remains “Satanic.”⁵⁰ Finally, it is clear that at least one significant funding stream for the Tea Party comes from a Mormon source. David Koch, heir to billions from his family’s oil business, is reported to be the major money behind the movement; his belief in and support of the Tea Party movement is linked, in his own words, to his faith.⁵¹

⁴⁶ “Who Says the Tea Party isn’t a Religious Movement? Part II”, June 3, 2010; http://www.religiondispatches.org/dispatches/joannabrooks/2736/who_says_the_tea_party_isn%E2%80%99t_a_religious_movement_part_ii/.

⁴⁷ Ron Bynum, “Tea Party Movement Influenced by Corporate Oil and Mormon Ideology”, January 25, 2010; <http://www.examiner.com/political-issues-in-modesto/tea-party-movement-influenced-by-corporate-oil-and-mormon-ideology>; Christopher Jones, “The Tea Party as a Religious Movement: A Response”, June 4, 2010; <http://usreligion.blogspot.com/2010/06/tea-party-as-religious-movement.html>.

⁴⁸ Kate Zernike, “Palin Rallies Tea Party Crowd in Nevada”, New York Times, March 27, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/28/us/politics/28nevadaweb.html>.

⁴⁹ “Poll: Mitt Romney Looking Good for 2012”, August 13, 2012, <http://mittromneycentral.com/>.

⁵⁰ Chris Gussa, “Glenn Beck, Christians, Mormons, and the Guys with the Tinfoil Hats!”, May 31, 2010, <http://www.teapartypatriots.org/BlogPostView.aspx?id=299cf82b-e249-420d-ac66-08d47edfc032>.

⁵¹ Andrew Goldman, “The Billionaire’s Party”, New York Times Magazine, July 25, 2010; <http://nymag.com/news/features/67285/>.

III. d. The Tea Party: Concluding Remarks

A few conclusions can be drawn about the Tea Party from this analysis.

The emergence of the Tea Party in the very early days of the Obama administration is related to the President's race. While politics have been increasingly-polarized for some decades, this kind of movement did not emerge until an African-American was in the White House. This is not a coincidence. Additionally, while many who participate in Tea Party rallies and protests may be experiencing economic stress, the demographic makeup of the movement, with a sizable majority that is white, male, and economically stable, brings into question the economic crisis of today as the pressure point that brought the movement to life.

Racial hate speech has been a constitutive part of the movement since the early days, continuing to the present. It is not accurate to say that the Tea Party is a racist movement. It is accurate to say that some leaders and some members are open and blatant in their racially-charged attitudes and speech, and that others who are more subtle in their rhetoric still participate in racism in more subtle ways. Tea Party leaders play a double game in terms of racism and race hatred. They allow for racist displays at rallies and protests. Then, when accused of racism publicly, they don't publicly disavow those displays. Instead, they turn the charge back on the accusers (for example, the NAACP), accusing the accusers of race-baiting and playing the race card. This approach can be effective in today's era of immediate media response in distracting people from the real issues at hand; it does not, however, change the attitudes being openly displayed. During the Copperhead era, business and industry leaders knew how to distract employees and poor people by pitting them against each other, creating

societal divides so that those at the bottom would not be able to pay adequate attention to the actions of those who were driving the agenda. Leaders of the Tea Party have also cultivated these skills, and use them effectively in their discussions of race.

Religion plays a multifaceted, dynamic and substantial role in the Tea Party movement. Evangelical Christianity is the banner for much of the movement. Some in this group are significantly Islamophobic. The presence of a smaller but powerful Mormon minority among those who lead, speak for and fund the movement must be considered in any examination of religion and the movement.

The participation of Mormons as leaders in the Tea Party suggests a new dynamic in the relationship of religion and political movements. For centuries, Christian affiliations and identities have played a secondary role in economic and political debates and strife of the times. However, the belief structure of Mormonism and its self-identity as an essentially American religion offer a potentially potent religious phenomenon in the Tea Party movement.

The power of the Internet in the emergence and growth of the Tea Party cannot be overstated. The Copperheads did not have such global reach in media available to them. Now, anyone with an opinion on pretty much anything can put it out there for the world to see it at the touch of a Google search. The Tea Party has called on people through often very aware use of this technology, along with social networking, linking great numbers of people instantly through computers and smart phones. These media are particularly effective in the use of slogans and short statements, but not helpful in the construction of complex arguments. This assists Tea

Party leaders communicate effectively with its identified audience, for whom it purports to speak, and to reliably generate expected response from this audience.

IV. Conclusion

In this article I have compared the Copperhead movement of the 1860s and the Tea Party movement of today. There is much the movements have in common. Economic issues drove both the emergence of the Copperheads and interest in the Tea Party today. Relationships and understandings between people of different races – African-American, EuroAmerican, and new immigrant white in the 1860s, and African-American, EuroAmerican, and new immigrants from a wide variety of nations today – impacted the development of both movements, and continue to impact the development and growth of the Tea Party now. Religious leaders in both eras were involved in the movements, and conflict between differing religious beliefs and practices feature in both movements.

But there are ways that the trajectory of the modern Tea Party differs considerably from the Copperheads. The foundational intermixing of racial attitudes (including racial hatred) and religious belief made evident through this analysis calls for reflection, both from academics and from Christian leaders and theologians. Further, the complex economic dynamics of the Tea Party, particularly in the quiet funding from donors with means, makes the movement different from the Copperheads; this issue also merits more exploration and research.

In this short review, I have identified a number of new elements within the Tea Party movement that are not as yet attracting academic attention. I have examined economic, race and

religion here; each of these call for deeper analysis. Other issues have emerged in my study that this article does not afford time or space to address. The place of women in the movement, despite Palin's prominence; the approach of the movement to disability; and the approach of the movement to sexual orientation are just a few. Academic research of this powerful movement is needed.

Finally, religious leaders from a variety of faith traditions and communions could helpfully speak into the void created by the use of Twitter- and texting-appropriate messaging that dominates communication about this movement. The power of this movement to affect change in policy and government, shown through the success of Tea Party-backed candidates in primary elections in 2010, should give those whose understanding of the Gospel does not match the religious agenda driven by the Tea Party, and leaders of religious communities outside Christianity, a sense of call to speak. Jim Wallis of Sojourners has been somewhat singular in his response from a different Christian perspective.⁵² Much of the commentary on the Tea Party is written from a sympathetic stance. Well-founded arguments can be made from religious grounds against the policies, speech and practices of the Tea Party, as Wallis ably shows. He has identified some lines of thought to call people to think; others can and should be found. Much of the Christian community, and much of the rest of the religious community, has been missing in this debate. I speculate that this is either from a sense that the kinds of rhetoric emitting from the movement don't deserve response, or from wariness about potentially biting the hands that feed congregational and denominational budgets.

⁵² "How Christian is Tea Party Libertarianism?" Huffington Post, May 27, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-wallis/how-christian-is-tea-part_b_592170.html.

In the 1860s, the Copperheads evoked fear, which was answered by both political and Christian leaders. In doing the research for this article, I found many significantly-frightening and very disturbing articles and speeches from Tea Party leaders. Conversely, I found very few people of faith, or academics, responding to the movement in any way. The Tea Party movement, its claims and agenda, call out for reflection and answers from thoughtful writers and speakers willing to do their homework, so to reply in ways that can be heard, and willing to engage the Tea Party where it operates and with those it attracts.