



Joy McCaman

The Tea Party: A Mixed Bag

by W. James Antle III

IN JANUARY, when Republican Scott Brown was elected to fill the remainder of the late senator Edward M. Kennedy's term, the activists who helped make it possible traced their political lineage back to the Boston Tea Party. Jubilant supporters dubbed it the "Scott heard round the world."

This Tea Party wanted to dump into the harbor a plan to expand the federal government's role in healthcare, and its main enemy was not King George III but President Barack Obama. True to his mission, Scott Brown cast the 41st vote against the healthcare-reform act. The legislation that was supposed to be the culmination of Ted Kennedy's career was rejected by voters deep in the heart of Kennedy country.

What came next was anything but revolutionary, however. The Democrats were stunned by Brown's election but decided to press forward. The healthcare bill passed in spite of Brown's vote.

In retrospect, the Tea Party movement's first electoral triumph does not seem like much of a breakthrough. What they got was a senator who was conservative by Massachu-

setts standards—surely, Leverett Saltonstall is spinning in his grave—but fairly moderate when compared with his colleagues on the national scale. Brown later denied that the Tea Party activists had much to do with his campaign's success, and he declined to address their rally in Boston. But the loose coalition of protesters and political agitators who profess to be outraged by the federal leviathan's size, cost, and indebtedness has the potential to be a significant conservative force in American politics.

For one thing, the people who identify with the Tea Party represent the biggest mass-protest movement of the right in the postwar era. It is often said that political demonstrations are a liberal's game because conservatives are too busy with jobs and families. Even on issues that span the ideological spectrum, like globalization or war, the big protests are overwhelmingly left-wing affairs.

Conservatives have had their protests before. Dedicated pro-lifers have long picketed and prayed outside abortion clinics. *Freerepublic.com* used to encourage "Freepers" to

carry signs and chant slogans. During the Clinton years, Republican activists handed out fortune cookies reminding people of the President's shady Chinese fundraising practices. But this is the first time in recent memory that state capitals across the country have been filled by demonstrators associated with causes of the right.

Another promising sign: The tax revolts of the 1970's and 80's that led to Proposition 13 in California and Proposition 2½ in Massachusetts, among other tax-limiting ballot initiatives, were fueled by objections to paying for big government. The Tea Partiers aim their fire at big government itself. Their protests really got going after the bailouts and hit the national radar during the debate over the \$787 billion stimulus package.

All this happened before any broad-based tax increase was signed into law. To be sure, the Tea Partiers do not want to pay high tax bills, especially to finance the lifestyles of others. But while Reagan-era tax protesters were willing to run deficits in order to see their taxes go down, the Tea Party activists understand that high spending and borrowing will have to be paid for eventually.

RHETORICALLY, MANY TEA PARTY supporters engage in a far more radical critique of the American state than that embraced by the mainstream conservative movement. In most contemporary conservative rhetoric, the country went to hell in a handcart in the 1960's. A few crusty old fogies point the finger at FDR's New Deal in the 1930's. Inspired in part by television and radio commentator Glenn Beck, the Tea Partiers trace the republic's decline to the "progressives" who began trashing the Constitution under Woodrow Wilson.

Mainstream conservatives since the Goldwater campaign in 1964 have had little use for constitutionalism, but it is important to the Tea Party movement, and today, the mainstream right is starting to catch up. In February, a group of Beltway conservatives met in Virginia to issue the Mount Vernon Statement, which emphasized enumerated powers and constitutionally limited government rather than the latest findings of some conservative think tank white paper.

Signs at Tea Party protests express such unfashionable sentiments as "Your mortgage is not my problem." It is not uncommon to see people dressed up as their favorite Founding Father or wearing powdered wigs and Revolutionary War-era garb. Even liberalism's most cherished taboos are tweaked. A placard spotted at one Tea Party event in the nation's capital read, "It doesn't matter what this says, you are going to say it is racist anyway."

Liberals have predictably greeted the Tea Party with a

mixture of derision, scorn, and terror. While deeming their own right to protest Republican governments sacrosanct, any similar sentiment from the right smacks of antigovernment "extremism" and Timothy McVeigh-style terrorism. And, because the President whose policies they protest is black, they are considered irredeemably racist. Some liberal commentary treats the Tea Party like the second coming of the storm troopers or a revived Ku Klux Klan.

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"The angry faces at Tea Party rallies are eerily familiar," wrote columnist Colbert King in the *Washington Post*.

They resemble faces of protesters lining the street at the University of Alabama in 1956 as Autherine Lucy, the school's first black student, bravely tried to walk to class. . . . Those were the faces I saw at a David Duke rally in Metairie, La., in 1991: sullen with resentment, wallowing in victimhood, then exploding with yells of excitement as the ex-Klansman and Republican gubernatorial candidate spewed vitriolic white-power rhetoric.

Tea Party protestors are rumored to have spit on congressmen and hurled racial epithets, but the evidence is rather thin. They "disrupt" town-hall meetings by asking their congressmen annoying questions about the government programs they are supposed to finance docilely through their tax dollars. Their ranks are replete with people who believe Obama was born in Kenya, who want the government to get its hands off their Medicare, and who probably drive pickup trucks.

Yet the Tea Party movement is not as radical as liberals fear or as conservatives hope. Once the powdered wigs are put away, it is not even clear how different they are from the average Republican voter. A *New York Times*/CBS News

poll found that 57 percent of them had a favorable view of big-spending president George W. Bush, and 62 percent believe popular middle-class entitlements like Social Security and Medicare are “worth the cost.”

On the other hand, the same poll found that 92 percent of Tea Party voters want a smaller government that offers fewer services, and only 6 percent trust Washington usually to do what is right. (Not a single respondent picked “always.”) The problem is the disconnect between their convictions and their practical political involvement: They expect unconventional things from fairly conventional Republican politicians.

Consider Scott Brown. While Brown’s election did not stop the healthcare legislation, it did endanger that bill in two ways: It restored the Senate Republicans’ ability to filibuster without Democratic defections, and it powerfully demonstrated that Democrats voted yes at their peril. But the Democrats used the reconciliation process to get around the first obstacle and decided simply to ignore the second. At that point, it was only a matter of how many Democrats were willing to risk their necks for the President’s agenda.

More than enough to make ObamaCare the law of the land, as it turned out. Now the Tea Party is left with a senator who is pro-choice, supported Mitt Romney’s Obama-like Massachusetts healthcare plan, voted against auditing the Federal Reserve, favors expansive war powers, and has rehired some of Kennedy’s immigration-policy staffers. This does not amount to a radical defense of liberty, and Brown will face a better-prepared Massachusetts Democratic Party in just two years.

At least the Scott Brown gambit had the potential to work, and it is possible that an even more intrusive healthcare-reform law would have been passed, had Brown lost the election. Other Tea Party political interventions are inexplicable. To the extent that the movement has any stated goals, opposing bailouts like the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) and repealing ObamaCare would seem to be high on the list. To do either, they will face opposition from both parties.

REPEALING OBAMACARE will require Republicans to take political risks as great as those taken by Democrats to pass it in the first place, something Republicans are only willing to do when it comes to prolonging unpopular foreign wars. They will have to break Democratic filibusters, override presidential vetoes, use the expedited reconciliation process, and refuse to fund the implementation of the new law—all without any guarantee of success.

Yet, according to a SurveyUSA poll taken in Indiana shortly before the May primary for the U.S. Senate, likely

voters who identified with the Tea Party movement broke 30 percent for former senator Dan Coats, 23 percent for state senator Marlin Stutzman, and 21 percent for former congressman John Hostettler. Coats, a “compassionate conservative” during his first stint in the Senate, had just returned to Indiana at the behest of Washington Republicans after lobbying on behalf of TARP recipients, the pharmaceutical industry that spent liberally to pass ObamaCare, and companies that stand to benefit from cap and trade.

Hostettler, by contrast, had a consistent record of opposing big government regardless of whether it was being promoted by Republicans or Democrats. He had voted against the 1996 budget deal to end the government shut-down, the unconstitutional Violence Against Women Act, No Child Left Behind, the Medicare prescription-drug benefit, and the Iraq war. Hostettler also opposed TARP.

Based on these records (campaign promises aside), which candidate seemed more likely to be willing to do what it takes to get rid of ObamaCare and stand athwart future bailouts? Not the one preferred by most Tea Party activists. Those too pure to support a lobbyist for big government went for Stutzman because he was a “Washington outsider,” even though he was a former congressional staffer whose campaign was heavily funded by the Beltway right.

Tea Party favorite Stutzman’s parting shot the week-end before the primary was to send out an e-mail telling his supporters that Hostettler “is in agreement with Ron Paul’s view of Israel and the Jews,” whatever that means. “In his book,” the missive continues, “Hostettler contends that President George W. Bush depended on intelligence provided by what Hostettler has called ‘neoconservatives with Jewish backgrounds.’” In fact, this was a quote from David Aiken, an author who is hostile to neither Jews nor neo-conservatives. Hostettler’s book was mainly about how he correctly assessed the intelligence concerning WMDs in Iraq before the war.

On the other hand, Tea Party activists in Kentucky strongly supported Rand Paul for the Republican senatorial nomination despite GOP hawks working overtime to smear both him and his father on foreign policy. After belatedly noticing that the younger Paul was beating the Republican-establishment candidate by double digits in all the public polls, the neoconservatives played the September 11 card until it was dog-eared.

“Trey Grayson is the candidate in this race who will make the right decisions necessary to keep America safe and prevent more attacks on our homeland,” former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani said in his statement endorsing Paul’s opponent. “He is not part of the ‘blame

America first' crowd that wants to bestow the rights of U.S. citizens on terrorists and point fingers at America for somehow causing 9/11."

Former vice president Dick Cheney also weighed in, declaring Grayson "right on the issues that matter"—presumably war, torture, and executive power. "I'm a lifelong conservative, and I can tell the real thing when I see it," Cheney continued.

The challenges posed by radical Islam and Al Qaeda are real and will be an on-going threat to our domestic security for years to come. We need Senators who truly understand this and who will work to strengthen our commitment to a strong national defense and to whom this is not just a political game.

In March, the call went out from neocon central. Former Cheney aide Cesar Conda fired off a worried e-mail to leading hawks: "On foreign policy, [Global War on Terror], Gitmo, Afghanistan, Rand Paul is NOT one of us." Conda's recipient list included William Kristol, Liz Cheney, Dan Senor, Marc Thiessen, and Robert Kagan.

But Tea Partiers stuck behind Paul, the self-described "constitutional conservative," as the candidate who opposed bailouts, a reckless monetary policy, and runaway federal spending. Rand Paul won the endorsement of Sarah Palin, Steve Forbes, Sen. Jim DeMint, and the man he was vying to replace, Sen. Jim Bunning. The most embarrassing setback for the party establishment, however, came when social-conservative leader James Dobson rescinded his endorsement of Grayson and threw his support to Paul.

Dobson openly said that Republican apparatchiks lied to him about Paul's position on abortion and other social issues. "Senior members of the GOP told me Dr. Paul is pro-choice and that he opposes many conservative perspectives, so I endorsed his opponent," Dobson explained. "But now I've received further information from OB/GYNs in Kentucky whom I trust, and from interviewing the candidate himself." He called his initial support for Grayson an "embarrassing mistake."

A revealing poll for *Politico* found that Tea Party members who attended the April 15 protest on the National Mall were split into roughly two camps: one that identified more with the consistent antistatism of Ron Paul, and another consonant with the conventional Republicanism of Sarah Palin. Palin and the elder Paul were the top two choices when the pollsters asked which political figure "best exemplifies the goals of the Tea Party movement." They were also the attendees' top two choices for president, with Palin tak-

ing 15 percent, and Paul 14.

This divide is imprecise but instructive. The Tea Party movement is driven by the sense that something distinctive about this country and its political inheritance is being lost. They see its government swelling to European proportions, its values as being alien to their own traditions, and its economic future as suddenly bleak. There is an immigration-driven demographic component to these concerns, mocked by *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow as "anachronistic" because Tea Partiers are "disproportionately white, evangelical Christian." But much of it has to do with the kind of government they are getting.

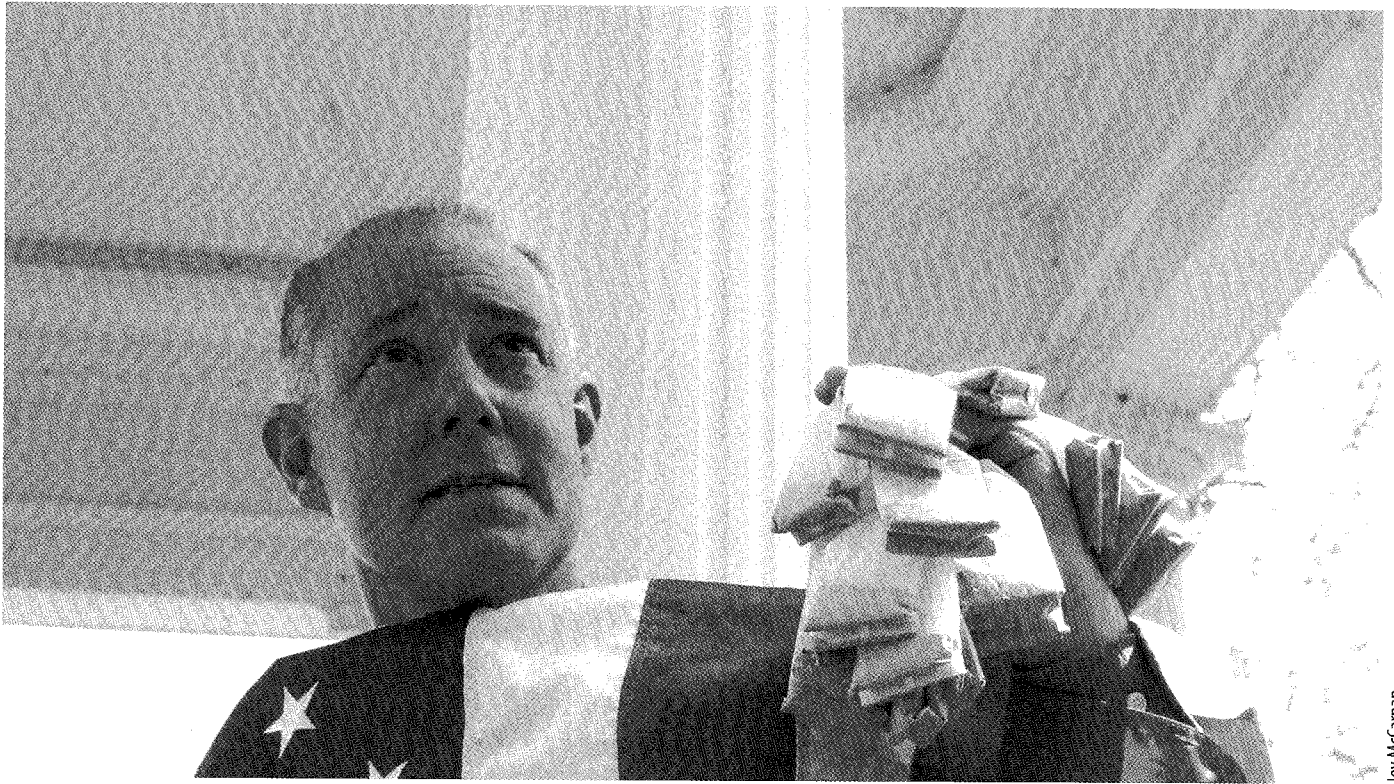
Today, the Tea Party resembles nothing so much as a Facebook-using version of the early conservative movement, before the neoconservatives—but just as susceptible to a neocon takeover.

Some Tea Party sympathizers have recognized these trends for years under both of the major political parties. For them, Obama is simply the last straw. Others have been jolted into action by the suddenness with which Obama has been able to take George W. Bush's fiscal irresponsibility to new levels. And for others the only problem is that a Democrat is imposing what they consider "socialism" on the country. They were happy with Bush and would be pleased to see Republican socialism return, perhaps as soon as the next election cycle.

The convictions that animate the Tea Party could lead to a more authentic conservatism. The Tea Party could also represent the biggest political opportunity yet for a renewed Middle American Radicalism. Or it could be exploited by jingoists, FOX News marketing researchers, and the Republican National Committee, as rage channeled into the indiscriminate election of GOP candidates.

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The New American Mob

by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

AFTER 16 MONTHS, perhaps the best one can say for the Tea Party is that the contempt it originally provoked within the American establishment has turned to consternation. If the Tea Party were composed of real Indians, the elite would be understanding, if not exactly encouraging, and not in the least alarmed or offended. Since, however, the modern Tea Partiers are only white people got up in paint and feathers, the American ruling class finds itself compelled, by its own prejudices, neuroses, and—it may be—fears, to recognize a potentially dangerous threat.

Over the past three months the Tea Party has broadened the scope of its protest, in particular with regard to immigration, an issue that it had previously taken care to avoid. Before the passage in April of SB1070 by the Arizona state legislature, which makes it a state crime to be in the country illegally and requires police officers to check the immigration status of suspicious persons, the Tea Party had focused its attention largely on taxation. Two decades ago George Will, the Beltway's idea of a "conservative" columnist, loft-

ily dismissed tax complaints by asserting that Americans, in comparison with the citizens of European countries, in fact are undertaxed. That was priggish of him, but taxes, though onerous and unfair, are really not the most pressing evil the American citizenry needs to resist. Since SB1070, the Tea Party has loudly defended Arizona's action, while simultaneously attacking and deriding the state's eminently attackable and derisive critics, who have so far succeeded only in exposing themselves as ideologues marching under the slogan ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION NOW, ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION FOREVER. More directly, the Tea Party has played an active role in a number of political primaries, and in one of them it enjoyed a glorious victory by bearing home the scalp of Republican Sen. Robert Bennett of Utah, an instructive example of a Republican-pseudo, from a party delegates' vote. (Bennett, reflecting the long-standing position of the Mormon church, always eager to import converts from abroad, is a strong partisan of immigration "reform.") In general, the Tea Party's success in the prima-