

word “tea” recalls the revolutionary zeal of a 1773 uprising against a British tax, when Americans threw British tea into Boston’s harbour. But in fact the “tea” in the Tea Party’s name is an acronym for Taxed Enough Already. Part populist uprising, part corporate shill and all far-right-wing, the movement swept 66 new Republicans into Congress in 2010, assuring Republican control of the House of Representatives.

It is a complex movement, whose ultimate significance is not yet clear. Steep examines its ideological profile and historical roots, identifies its leaders and followers, and reviews its most prominent organisations. Many contributors

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are established scholars of the Right, whose knowledge is based in both progressive politics and reliable research, and the articles present the range of analyses that is the strength of a successful collection. Taken together, articles by Charles Postel, Chip Berlet and Clarence Y.H. Lo trace the roots of the Tea Party in several right-wing US movements: the reactionary activism against Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal in the 1930s; the McCarthy hearings and the John Birch Society’s extreme anti-communism of the 1950s; and the rise of the New Right and the Religious Right in the 1970s and 1980s. None of those earlier movements were able to capture the Republican Party in its entirety: in the run-up to the 2012 elections, however, the Tea Party appears to have seized effective control. As a loose confederation of activists, politicians and huge funders deploying both grass-roots organising tactics and big-money mobilisation, it is able to unite corporate interests, anti-government libertarians and social conservatives. Mitt Romney was forced to cater to its ideologues to capture the Republican presidential nomination.

Specific questions about the Tea Party movement, especially concerning race and gender, are also addressed. Melissa Deckman mines data from the 2010 PEW Internet and American Life survey to determine the extent to which

Tea Party women are drawn from the Christian Right, and finds that they are likely to be more theologically conservative than either Republican women generally or all women nationally. She also explores the influence of women in the movement and finds it to be greater than their influence within the Republican Party as a whole.

Racism is inevitably raised in discussions of the Tea Party, especially with regard to “birther” claims (in which Obama’s US birth is questioned and his Kenyan father and early years in Indonesia are cited as proof that he is not a “true” American) and placards seen at Tea Party rallies mocking the president’s black features. Here, contributor Joseph Lowndes explores the subtle differences in the racism of past racial backlashes and current Tea Party activism. He takes into consideration the fact that economic hard times have inspired anger, anxiety and resentment in white, middle-class Republicans, and the Tea Party’s willingness to capitalise on those emotions. Yet racism persists at its core. It is no accident that the election of a black president has set off yet another wave of right-wing activism in the US.

For years, Republicans have subtly promoted a division of US citizenry into the “deserving” and the “undeserving”. The Tea Party claims to speak for “deserving” Americans who work hard, pay taxes, generally hold Christian beliefs, and are not dependent on government – with the backing of corporate raiders and market fundamentalists bent on anti-regulation, anti-union, low-tax reforms. While leftists, liberals and many moderates hold Tea Party members up to ridicule for their uninformed and reactionary views, the majority are, in fact, middle class, educated, white and male. They have become an influential voting bloc, however loosely coordinated. No matter how the Republicans fare in the impending elections, the Tea Party has helped to solidify the party’s move to the Right. *Steep* is an important source for an understanding of the present and future polarisation of US politics.

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Since the 2008 election of Democrat Barack Obama, the US’ first black president, a movement known as the Tea Party has emerged within the Republican Party. Here, Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost of the Center for Right-Wing Studies at the University of California, Berkeley present 24 articles – by scholars as well as three well-chosen non-academic experts on the US Right – that analyse it as a social movement.

In popular US folklore, the