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Why I Love the Occupy Wall Street Crowd

Not too long ago I shocked and disappointed my liberal friends by pontificating on “Why I Love the Tea Party.” The Tea Party started, as many such movements do, as a grass-roots protest movement. High taxes and “what do we get for it?” reactions to government spending has motivated many political movements. Alexander Hamilton was in favor of borrowing to pay off Revolutionary War debts, but he believed that taxes would eventually wither away, much as Karl Marx expected the need for the state to disappear in a nebula of nihilism.

The marvelous role of all initially leaderless protest movements is that they have irritating things to say. The majority of the people may or may not agree with the message of the movement, but it usually cannot be ignored. The history of the Anti-Federalists, the Whigs, the Know-Nothings, the Socialists, the Bull Moose, and other sudden outcroppings of social frustration is that they become absorbed by the major parties. Some kernel of the ear of corn that represents the protest movement goes into the soup that comprises American politics. This is good, not bad. It is through this absorption process that violent political confrontation is avoided and new ideas sometimes germinate into fully flowering plants. It is the American way to invent new ideas if for no other reason than to influence the organism into which the meandering microbes are implanted.

The Tea Party has us talking about taxes, spending, priorities, the role of wealth in society, the distribution of wealth, and even the grand old American Constitution. What can be better than studying the Constitution and arguing over its meaning? What is the original intent of the Framers, and can we ever figure that out given differences among the revolutionary generation themselves? Sometimes, as it has been wisely written, the journey is more important than the destination. The debate initiated by the Tea Party is good for America, as is the inevitable winnowing process that follows therefrom.

Now enter the “Occupy” whatever movement. Those folks are also upset about taxes, particularly who pays what. The “Occupy” protest movement may focus on spending priorities and perhaps would like to see the Constitution enforced in the image of the heroes of the latest American blossom. Perhaps the Occupy protesters are the ying of the Tea Party yang, as the media would like to pretend. More likely, both movements are simply differing colors broken apart from the same ray of light after it passes through this prism of public opinion. This is not to say that the two protest movements are totally dissimilar. The theoretical constant of American politics simply recognizes that the same ray of social intensity may be broken down into constituent parts comprising opinions that drive a substantively similar debate.

It cannot be gainsaid that both the Tea Party and the Occupiers want to talk about distribution of wealth, taxes, spending, debt, and the direction of America. Let us never forget in our gleeful dismissal of these two groups that both protest movements may do more to bring people to the polls at election time than all the well spent money of Barack Obama or Mitt Romney. It should be no shock that both politicians are scratching their respective heads trying to figure out how they can hitch a ride on the movement that best represents the Acela train that will travel straight to Washington DC.

Without doubt, there are weird, creepy people in both the Tea Party and the Occupy Wall Street tent. Strangeness, and even abject dumbness, never disqualified anyone from holding opinions or voting on Election Day. What should not be forgotten, however, is that both the Tea Party and the Occupiers represent a lot of motivated, angry people and perhaps even some curiosity seekers. Both Tea Party and Occupiers of Wall Street will have their impact, some negative and some positive. They will help America continue its 250 year national debate, and most importantly they will enliven the political process much too concerned with personality cults more appropriate to the arenas of sports and entertainment.

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