MIDDLE-CLASS MELANCHOLIA

SELF-SUFFICIENCY AFTER THE DEMISE OF CHRISTIANIZED CAPITALISM

(U.S. STYLE)

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Today there is much talk that the ability to conform to the ideal of the self-sufficient self is in jeopardy in the United States.[[1]](#footnote-1) The economic landscape has created a difficult terrain for ordinary Americans. The evaporation of decently paying manufacturing jobs, the declining influence of labor unions, the hollowing out of the welfare state, and the lag in economic regulation have now joined a shift to an economy where finance is the main source of profit.[[2]](#footnote-2) These forces have combined to undermine the bedrock identity of the personally responsible, self-sufficient person that long ago was put on the cultural pedestal by the traditional Protestant work ethic. The risks of making it into and staying in the middle class are increasingly for people to handle on their own with less backup from the government, making middle-class status all that more tenuous.[[3]](#footnote-3) The “fear of falling,” as Barbara Ehrenreich called it, has become pervasive among ordinary people.[[4]](#footnote-4) In particular, anxieties about debt, both public and personal, weigh heavily on our individual and collective (un)conscious. The resulting political mood for the vast majority of Americans, those neither on the top nor the bottom, reflects what we can call “middle-class melancholia.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Sigmund Freud famously distinguished melancholia from mourning when he wrote, “The analogy with mourning led us to conclude that [the patient] had suffered a loss in regard to an object; what he tells us points to a loss in regard to his ego.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Both mourning and melancholia reflect grief over a loss, usually of a loved one, a love object, a prized and valued attachment of some kind, or even an ideal. Yet while mourning is grieving over a loss external to oneself, melancholia grows out of a loss of self-regard, even if that comes from losing something or someone external to oneself. Melancholia, for Freud, reflects a person who disavows the loss incurred, is internally at war with oneself, and preoccupied with repudiating oneself as responsible for the external loss the person has incurred (but refuses to accept).

For Freud, melancholia was pathological compared with mourning, which he saw as a healthy response to loss. Ilit Ferber eloquently summarizes Freud’s distinction of melancholia from mourning:

In his 1917 essay “Mourning and Melancholy,” Freud recognizes two mutually exclusive responses to loss—mourning [Trauer] and melancholia [Melancholie]. This sharp distinction between the two responses has long since become almost synonymous with the understanding of a normal versus a pathological reaction to loss, and the clear demarcation between them. At the outset of Freud’s article the two responses would seem closely related, but the question of the acceptance and acknowledgement of the loss complicates the picture and draws them apart. Both Freud’s mourner and melancholic begin with a basic denial of their loss and an unwillingness to recognize it. But soon enough, the mourner, who is reacting in a non-pathological manner, recognizes and responds to the call of reality, to let go of the lost-loved object and liberate libidinal desire. This is the point of divergence with the melancholic who remains sunken in his loss, unable to acknowledge and accept the need to cleave and in a self-destructive loyalty to the lost object, internalizes it into his ego, thus furthermore circumscribing the conflict related to the loss. The lost object continues to exist, but as part of the dejected subject, who can no longer clearly define the borders between his own subjectivity and the existence of the lost object within it. The structure of this melancholic response is conceived by Freud as an antithesis to the basic well-being of the ego, the survival of which is put at risk.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Melancholia for Walter Benjamin was not necessarily pathological as much as it was a fundamental condition of human existence reflective of people’s tragic sense of their mortality.[[8]](#footnote-8) For Benjamin, melancholia and mourning were interrelated.[[9]](#footnote-9) Extending Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben has noted that a close reading of Freud suggests that melancholia precedes the loss of something a person never actually possessed, in all cases whether it is a loved one, a status, or an ideal.[[10]](#footnote-10) The lost object emanates from the imaginary, as in an imagined or idealized understanding that is being lost. Melancholia is more an ongoing, gnawing anxiety about what might come to pass concerning how one imagines his or her relationship to the world. Melancholia therefore ultimately is about a sense of self-relative to some idealized standard. Elisabeth Anker succinctly characterizes in Freudian terms how the issue of identity emerges from the melancholic’s handling of loss:

For Freud, the process of identification begins out of an experience of losing something or someone that one has loved. This lost object can be a person, an abstract concept such as an ideal, or one’s country. Identification is a way of managing this loss, and it requires relinquishing one’s earlier desire to have what was loved and is now gone. . . . In identification, one substitutes oneself, part of one’s ego, for the lost object. . . . Identification can be seen as a coping mechanism that constitutes subjectivity by its attempt to manage loss, an attempt to satisfy one’s own desires when they are not satisfied by others.[[11]](#footnote-11)

For Freud, the melancholic endures a split sense of self where he comes to be obsessed with the idea that he was not worthy to be associated with what was loved (and now lost).[[12]](#footnote-12)

Middle-class melancholia is very much an issue of identity. In the face of growing economic uncertainty, middle-class melancholia transforms material concerns over economic well-being into issues of identity and self-understanding. It reflects a self-loathing born from grief over loss of the ability to realize the personal responsibility ideal. Middle- class melancholia involves an ongoing anxiety about the sustainability of the self-sufficiency ideal (something that was never actually obtainable for many Americans) and whether a person can now even keep up the appearance of being financially secure (when in fact he or she under capitalism must of necessity had to live a life that includes an always looming economic insecurity).

Middle-class existence was evanescent for many Americans for much of the country’s history, but the middle-class ideal continued to be valorized as something worth striving for, as realistically feasible if not always realized in practice. For the middle class today, however, we increasingly hear that people worry whether even the self-sufficiency ideal is sustainable as something that is worth aspiring to, given it is decreasingly achievable via stable employment that made it the bedrock ideal of the capitalist economy of the post–World War II period. The melancholia that results from loss of the ability to attain the ideal adds anxiety to the growing concern about how more mundane things like taxes and debt affect the status of the middle class today.[[13]](#footnote-13) Many people who had identified as middle class come to simultaneously resent the ideal as cruel while still worrying about their ability to meet it. Middle-class melancholia ultimately involves of necessity a splitting of the self, as Freud suggests, that often takes the form of expressing self-loathing by demonizing today’s actually existing indebted middle class, themselves included, when they give up the ideal and become preoccupied with financial maneuvering to sustain but the appearance of middle-class self-sufficiency.

Middle-class coping is a critical site for playing out anxieties about debt and taxes that are associated with the possibility of losing the ability to be seen as a personally responsible person who acts consistently with the self-sufficient ideal. Even though middle-class melancholia is more about the symbolic rather than the material conditions associated with the self-sufficiency ideal, it has palpable consequences for how people behave individually and collectively. And while they may not experience destitution like those in the social-economic strata below them, the economic shocks the middle class absorbs may be politically more consequential given their continued participation in the political process at relatively high rates compared with to the working class and the poor. Middle-class political mobilizations may in fact be the fulcrum for coming political change.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The actual experience of economic dislocation can compound the psychological destabilization. Not surprisingly, there is social science research demonstrating that experiencing economic shocks can heighten worries about one’s economic future and these shocks can even affect policy attitudes.[[15]](#footnote-15) Yet the real fact of the matter is that middle-class melancholia does not need such evidence for its activation because it is based on anxiety about what may happen regardless of whether it actually does. Middle-class melancholia, as I am conceiving of it, is activated irrespective of whether someone has actually experienced economic shocks. Middle-class melancholia is about affect more than effect. It is about the anxiety over continuing to make it in the changing economy and how that anxiety can affect how people see themselves and others in their class and even in society overall irrespective of what their income and occupational status actually is.

We arrive at middle-class melancholia once the ideal of the self-sufficient self is called into question to the point that there arises among members of the middle class the necessity of resorting to a politics of self-loathing, where such things as politicking for more tax cuts and vilifying debt (both by people and the government) takes precedence in the name of maintaining appearances as upstanding middle-class citizen-subjects.[[16]](#footnote-16) Middle-class melancholia is born of this impostor mentality that many in the middle class must maintain, pained as they are to have to resort to pantomiming the self-sufficient self, while violating the standard in their actual pecuniary practices (as when scheming as private actors who avoid paying their fair share of taxes that could pay down the government’s debts). Middle-class melancholia encourages attempts at sustaining the idea that the ideal of the personally responsible, self-sufficient self can still be credibly enacted in practice but only by demonizing taxes and public and private debt because they have come to be seen as an embarrassing revelation that strips away the façade of middle-class status in the financialized economy.[[17]](#footnote-17)

This is the psyche of many anxious members of the middle class today, especially those whose economic status has in one way or another caused them to confront economic “precarity.” Guy Standing has suggested that a new class is emerging reflective of the transformed economy, which he calls “the Precariat.”[[18]](#footnote-18) For Standing, the precariat replaces Marx’s proletariat as the new “dangerous class.” Standing, however, emphasizes the precariat’s diversity as opposed to the proletariat’s homogeneity as a distinct stratum in the class system. The precariat includes homeowners who cannot pay their mortgages, as well as those who have been made homeless, the downwardly mobile professionals recently thrown out of the upper middle class the long-term unemployed from the lower rungs of the laboring classes, students with massive amounts of education debt as well as people living off unpaid credit card balances and a diversity of others struggling to survive in the changing economy. Their diversity implies variations in their concerns about their economic precarity; it also suggests the necessity of thinking in new ways about how they can be organized for political action to redress their grievances.[[19]](#footnote-19)

While sustaining a middle-class identity has for much of the history of the post–World War II economy been a struggle for many Americans, the precarious nature of maintaining that identity has intensified over the last three-plus decades of economic change, where the economy grows but average incomes stagnate. And post–Great Recession, stories abound about a growing precarious workforce of “casualized” (i.e., temporary) laborers, including so-called microearners who lack stable employment and work on assignment in what is called the “share economy” for a growing number of companies such as Uber, Lyft, and Task-Rabbit.[[20]](#footnote-20) Whether they are ferreting travelers back and forth from the airport or taking on temporary child-care assignments, the growing numbers of these types of workers sustain themselves and their families by working from home, and going from one assignment to another at odd hours, often with low pay and without health insurance, sick leave, vacation, or retirement benefits. So the old precarity is now intensified and the myth of a broad middle class itself comes under a cloud of suspicion as no longer sustainable even as an ideal. The day laborer rather than the organization man becomes the archetype of the workforce as workers “downscale” their expectations and learn to get by with less. No wonder the evanescent ideal of the self-sufficient middle-class wage earner cannot but be looked on from a melancholic perspective.

In what follows, I contrast the Tea Party and Occupy as critical movements that are disproportionately composed of people who identify as middle class and are responding to the rise of the self-sufficiency issue post–Great Recession. I examine how melancholia operates in each, especially regarding issues of debt and taxes. I rely on Tayyab Mahmud’s argument about the centrality of the debt in the changing economy.[[21]](#footnote-21) I demonstrate how debt preoccupations promote what Michel Foucault called “neoliberal governmentality,” as the emerging orientation where people are expected to evaluate their self-worth in terms of their ability to leverage their own human capital to succeed in an increasingly market-centered society.[[22]](#footnote-22) I analyze how neoliberal governmentality heightens the insistence that people adhere to the standard of the self-sufficient individual all the more intensely just at the moment it begins to fade away as a credible ideal. I conclude with a discussion of how to connect disparate forms of resistance to the debt economy in order promote political mobilization that can help people resist their subordination in the latest phase of ordinary capitalism. In an era when so much of American politics is focused on the idea of sustaining middle-class status as stabile identity, middle-class melancholia looms large in casting a long shadow, for worse as well as better, over politics and the policy process.

MIDDLE-CLASS MELANCHOLIA AND TEA PARTY DOCTRINE

In an economy that makes ordinary people increasingly economically precarious, how do members of the middle class continue to imagine themselves as the standard bearers for the norm of the personally responsible citizen-subjects? Part of the answer is by practicing a middle-class melancholia that splits the self (between private debtor and public taxpayer), disavowing both dependence on assistance or the obligation to support it so as to sustain the commitment to the idealized, self-sufficient self. With this double disavowal comes a substitution: desire for the idealized self-sufficient self is replaced by the repetitive drive to enact lesser versions of it in the contemporary scene. In Freudian terms, the shift from mourning to melancholia involves a substitution where desire is given up and instead people settle into a preoccupation with the more fundamental instinctual drive without taking it to the level of pursuing fulfilling, self-affirming desire.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The case of the Tea Party is instructive. The Tea Party has become a significant force in U.S. politics, as an elite-backed but nonetheless popular political movement. It has been found to be disproportionately older, white, and middle class in its members’ identification (if not actual economic standing).[[24]](#footnote-24) The Tea Party is most especially composed of people who are very concerned about whether government debt will lead to higher taxes for the middle class and above. It is a social movement that has achieved a significant presence in the Republican Party, pushing the party far to the right on these issues, while bringing new levels of desperate extremism into mainstream politics. Tea Partiers are most centrally concerned about the growing risks of downward mobility in the post–Great Recession restructured economy. As the economy loses the ability to ensure people the ability to realize the ideal of the self-sufficient self, those who have invested heavily in that ideal, psychically as well as politically and economically, become especially vulnerable to the anxiety that comes with having to try to sustain the realization of that ideal in their own lives by whatever means, including resisting tax increases to pay off the debts of people they see as not adhering to the ideal of the personally responsible, self-sufficient self.

The origins of the Tea Party as an idea has been traced to an outburst on television by CNN business reporter Rick Santelli over the Obama administration’s proposals to bail out those homeowners whose homes were at that point “underwater” due to the bursting of the housing bubble. These homeowners bought their homes at much higher prices than they could get if they sold them at the time that the housing market went down taking the global economy with it. If they sold, they would not be able to pay off their mortgages in full, making theme “underwater.” The idea of the government stepping in and helping them restructure their mortgages infuriated Santelli, who on the air exploded in a tirade that included a call for a “Chicago Tea Party,” evidently suggesting a reenactment of the original American Revolution Boston Tea Party action against taxes imposed by the British monarch but now in the president’s hometown of Chicago.[[25]](#footnote-25) Santelli was simultaneously suggesting that Obama was some kind of modern-day royal lording over the ordinary people and that people who would take such a bailout from the government were violating the implied standard about who is a responsible citizen-subject in our market-centered society. In other words, the government should not be imposing its will on us and we should be handling our economic investments on our own. Santelli’s tirade against government aid to those who should be seen as people who must accept responsibility for the housing debts they have incurred might not have been the most eloquent or the most thought out, but it spoke deeply about the implied position of what would become the Tea Party movement. Therefore, from its inception, the Tea Party has been not so much a debtor class but a class of economically stratified people who share a number of economically conservative concerns including not having to assume obligation for other people’s debt. As one popular Tea Party placard proclaims: “Give me liberty, not your debt”![[26]](#footnote-26)

Yet there is a split in the Tea Party consciousness. For years, debt and taxes cut to the core of the practical workarounds many in the middle class have used for sustaining the identity of the personally responsible, self-sufficient self. For years, tax cuts, private debt, and public deficits have been relied on to keep up the appearance of that middle-class identity. Raising taxes to pay for other people’s indebtedness becomes nothing less than scandalous for those suffering from middle-class melancholia. Theirs is a melancholy about how extra public burdens via taxation to bail out others (as well as payments on the public debt) will also threaten to reveal how they themselves have had to resort to various alternative means to keep up appearances as middle class.

This political-economic anxiety about avoiding public taxes while accruing private debt is compounded by demographic change in the electorate. At one level, this takes the form of seeing others as interlopers threatening to unmask the charade of keeping up middle-class appearances. The issue of public debt has been framed as borrowing money to pay for expensive social welfare programs for those who are not practicing personal responsibility and are not being self-sufficient. At another level, the anxiety stems from fear of being pushed aside politically. The electorate is increasingly younger, more racially and ethnically diverse, and composed of more people from the laboring classes below the Tea Partiers.[[27]](#footnote-27) A growing anxiety beyond the Tea Party infiltrating the Republican Party overall is the concern that it is losing the ability to communicate its agenda to this changing electorate.[[28]](#footnote-28) If not racist, Tea Party members have expressed high levels of anxiety about the changing racial composition of the electorate and its elected political leadership, starting with most especially the presidency of Barack Obama, the first African American elected to the highest office in the land. The Tea Party may appear to be celebrating capitalist individualism but on closer examination a better case is made that it serves as a crucible for political as well as economic anxieties of elements of the middle class. Given its concerns about how “other” people threaten to take away their idealized understanding of middle-class America, Tea Party becomes nothing less than this country’s National Front.

Yet in many ways we can say that the Tea Party has seen the enemy and they are them. For many people their status is liminal; they are at risk of both increased debt and great taxation to cover the growing need that comes with insufficient resources. To take one example, many participants in the Tea Party movement are older, white Americans are recipients of Social Security; however, that reliance on the government must be repudiated in order to protect the cherished idealized self-sufficient self. Interviews with Tea Party participants show this disavowal can be difficult and even confusing:

While the Tea Party supporters are more conservative than Republicans on some social issues, they do not want to focus on those issues: about 8 in 10 say that they are more concerned with economic issues, as is the general public. When talking about the Tea Party movement, the largest number of respondents said that the movement’s goal should be reducing the size of government, more than cutting the budget deficit or lowering taxes. And nearly three-quarters of those who favor smaller government said they would prefer it even if it meant spending on domestic programs would be cut. But in follow-up interviews, Tea Party supporters said they did not want to cut Medicare or Social Security—the biggest domestic programs, suggesting instead a focus on “waste.” Some defended being on Social Security while fighting big government by saying that since they had paid into the system, they deserved the benefits. Others could not explain the contradiction. “That’s a conundrum, isn’t it?” asked Jodine White, 62, of Rocklin, Calif. “I don’t know what to say. Maybe I don’t want smaller government. I guess I want smaller government and my Social Security.” She added, “I didn’t look at it from the perspective of losing things I need. I think I’ve changed my mind.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

As Suzanne Mettler reports: “At a gathering in Simpsonville, South Carolina, in August 2009, one man told Republican Representative Robert Inglis: ‘Keep your government hands off my Medicare!’”[[30]](#footnote-30) Tea Partiers are frequently, it seems, divided against themselves. They want to continue to be seen as conforming to the standards of personal responsibility and self-sufficiency that make for inclusion in the middle class but are opposed to the very programs that have helped people achieve middle-class status or maintain it in their later years. One way to resolve (or at least cover up) the contradiction is to suggest that government benefits are their own personal assets, as in “my” Medicare. In fact, programs like Social Security and Medicare are structured in ways that help perpetuate this divided self. Because people pay into the system for financing these programs they come to see their benefits as earned in contradistinction to welfare programs, which are seen as mere handouts.[[31]](#footnote-31) The “insurance myth” as it has been frequently called keeps alive the idea that these benefits are personal and private, that they are earned, that taking them does not mean you have added to the collective burden of society to support you in violation of the middle-class standard of the self-sufficient self.

This split consciousness is becoming more difficult to sustain. Arguably the charade is maintained today only by practicing a middle-class melancholia that splits the self (between private debtor and public taxpayer), disavowing both current dependence on assistance and the obligation to support it so as to sustain the self’s commitment to the idealized, self-sufficient self. Under these conditions, we find a melancholia that involves not just anxiety about the inability to conform to the standard but also an unacknowledged giving up on the middle-class ideal itself. The economically precarious cannot but replace the ideal with an ersatz version. Part of this downscaled version involves a phobia regarding debt and taxes as both increasingly necessary and stigmatizing. This includes demonizing both personal indebtedness and the government’s fiscal deficits when denied the ability to raise taxes to cover its debts. The private guilt over some people’s inability to pay their debts becomes the public shame that we as a society likewise cannot balance our books.

Debt phobia continues even as the government imposes austerity on itself (which ends up holding back spending that could help reenergize the economy). Once the fear of debt takes hold it is out of proportion to the actual size of the debts incurred. What is critical here then are the psychic costs of giving up desire to realize the ideal of the self-sufficient self by engaging in productive activity and instead settling for the lesser preoccupation with getting tax breaks and benefits merely to maintain the appearances of being a self-sufficient self, even as these takings bankrupt the government and bring the issue of debt to the collective rather than the individual level. For Joseph Stiglitz, this shift from productive activity to gaming the tax system promotes a “rentier class” that is bound to become self-loathing if not explicitly melancholic:

There is a strong intuitive case to be made for the idea that tax rates have encouraged rent-seeking at the expense of wealth creation. There is an intrinsic satisfaction in creating a new business, in expanding the horizons of our knowledge, and in helping others. By contrast, it is unpleasant to spend one’s days fine-tuning dishonest and deceptive practices that siphon money off the poor, as was common in the financial sector before the 2007–8 financial crisis. I believe that a vast majority of Americans would, all things being equal, choose the former over the latter. But our tax system tilts the field. It increases the net returns from engaging in some of these intrinsically distasteful activities, and it has helped us become a rent-seeking society.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Yet the ultimate result politically is that this transferring of debt from the individual to the collective intensifies the charade of middle-class melancholia by putting it on a broader public stage and thereby making it all the more dramatically a subject for debate. The public shame of being complicit in helping the United States become a debtor society is added to the private guilt of those who have failed as self-sufficient selves.[[33]](#footnote-33)

The reasons this split takes the form of melancholia taps deep emotional currents running through U.S. political culture historically. At its base, Tea Party melancholia is over the inability to continue to practice the Protestant ethic. Today, the “Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine,” as William Connolly has called it, animates Tea Partiers’ melancholia.[[34]](#footnote-34) It moralizes the preoccupation with addressing their economic insecurity as effectively as possible even if to the neglect of our collective well-being. The Tea Party’s moralistic concern about the failure to be self-sufficient is simultaneously more and less intense than that that comes from their Christianity alone. Fred Block and Margaret Somers make this point when they tag the Tea Party outlook as one of “market fundamentalism.”[[35]](#footnote-35) Block and Somers use “market fundamentalism” “because the term conveys the quasi-religious certainty expressed by contemporary advocates of market self-regulation. Moreover, [it] . . . emphasize[s] the affinity with religious fundamentalisms that rely on revelation or a claim to truth independent of the kind of empirical verification that is expected in the social sciences.”[[36]](#footnote-36)

This individualistic but moralistic mindset about the natural equilibrium of a self-regulating economy stretches back at least to Adam Smith. It creates the foundation myth that Karl Polanyi called the “economistic fallacy,” that is, that autonomous individuals do not depend on anything else for their participation in a market system that is God-given, natural, self-regulating, and self-sustaining independent of the social and political institutions that brought them and it into being and make them possible.[[37]](#footnote-37) The economistic fallacy of the autonomous individual participating in an autonomous market system has long predominated as an unquestioned conceit in the white-collar class, as C. Wright Mills called it. Mills traces its rise to the ascendency of market capitalism:

The world of small entrepreneurs was self-balancing. Within it no central authority allocated materials and ordered men to specified tasks, and the course of its history was the unintended consequence of many scattered wills each acting freely. It is no wonder that men thought this so remarkable they called it a piece of Divine Providence, each man's hand being guided as if by magic into a preordained and natural harmony. The science of economics, which sought to explain this extraordinary balance, which provided order through liberty without authority, has not yet entirely rid itself of the magic. The providential society did have its economic troubles. Its normal rhythm of slump and boom alternately frightened and exhilarated whole sections and classes of men. Yet it was not seized by cycles of mania and melancholia. The rhythm never threw the economy into the lower depths known intimately to twentieth-century men, and for long years there were no fearful wars or threats of wars. The main lines of its history were linear, not cyclical; technical and economic processes were still expanding, and the cycles that did occur seemed seasonal matters which did not darken the whole outlook of the epoch.[[38]](#footnote-38)

It is this romanticized self-sufficient self of the providential society that now is the bemoaned lost object of a Tea Party trapped in unbalanced cycles of “mania and melancholia.” At some level of consciousness (even if subconsciousness), the Tea Party engages in a middle-class melancholia much as Freud characterized melancholia, internalizing its loss as a loss of an idealized self, splitting the self as it is experienced now from that idealized self, disavowing the self as experienced the world today in the name of vouchsafing the unattainable idealized self, but then ultimately forsaking the desire of the idealized self by substituting the mere repetitive drive enacting a lesser self as a neurotic response. Yet the growing levels of personal debt for some coupled with infinite demands for lower taxes by others become the drive of a politics serving as a less than satisfying alternative long after the desire for pursuing the ideal self-sufficient self has gone away.[[39]](#footnote-39) Post–Great Recession, the increasingly vulnerable, not-so-self-sufficient self, therefore, represents a shameful unmasking that must be covered up. The charade that comes with this cover-up must ultimately weigh heavily as cries of hypocrisy resound through public discourse and are likely to heighten the need to publicly denigrate others as even worse examples of failing to adhere to the moral standard of the personally responsible self-sufficient self.

A vicious cycle of denigration gives way to ritualized invocations of scapegoats. Middle-class melancholia begets a politics of demonization. The usual suspects are trotted out, the drug addicts, the welfare queens, and so on, to be symbolically hanged in the public square and to be literally cut off from needed public assistance. The result is a renewed moral panic leading to misguided state laws focused on disciplining the poor, especially those among the poor who cost money, such as welfare mothers who are accused of irresponsibly selling food stamps to buy drugs or not parenting their children properly or committing other acts that demonstrate they violate the moral code of the middle-class ideal of the self-sufficient self.[[40]](#footnote-40) The moralistic character of these policies highlights how the anxiety about failing to conform to the idealized standard of the self-sufficient self is a question of identity more than of economics.

An aberrant but indicative event dramatizing how middle-class melancholia found expression in moralistic arguments about public debt occurred on the night of October 16, 2013, when the House of Representatives was voting to raise the debt ceiling and reopen the government after a seventeen-day shutdown that had been pushed by the Tea Party–led Republican majority in the House as a failed strategy to defund the Affordable Care Act (aka Obamacare) and to demand cuts in social welfare programs in exchange for raising the debt ceiling. As the votes were being tallied, a House stenographer, Diane Reidy, took the podium and proclaimed: “He will not be mocked . . . . The greatest deception﻿ here is not ‘one nation under God.’ It never was. Had it been, it would not have been . . . . The Constitution would not have been written by Freemasons. They go against God. You cannot serve two masters. Praise be to God, Lord Jesus Christ.” Reidy seemed to be suggesting that the House was divided over the debt ceiling not on economic grounds but on moral grounds. She was forcibly removed from the podium by the House parliamentarian, questioned by police, and then taken to a hospital to be evaluated as to her mental state.[[41]](#footnote-41) This incident is seemingly inexplicable until we begin to appreciate how the Tea Partiers and others have come to see the issues of the debt in moralistic terms.

There is pervasive evidence available in public discourse that this insistence that we must be frugal and pay down our public debt reflects less an economic analysis than an argument that is grounded in moralistic arguments about personal responsibility. Yet it is more. The anxiety about debt reflects not just a moralistic orientation but one that reflects anxieties about class differences that are highly racialized. Among the Tea Party there is all too much talk about those “other” people who are trapped in poverty because they are not practicing personal responsibility and are dragging down the whole society, miring it in economic stagnation post–Great Recession.

Behind the concerns about not rewarding bad behavior, there is fear of the other and what that other represents about the future of the country. Christopher Parker and Matt Baretto write: “[P]eople are driven to support the Tea Party from the anxiety they feel as they perceive the America they know, the country they love, slipping away, threatened by the rapidly changing face of [what] they believe is the ‘real’ America: a heterosexual, Christian, middle-class, (mostly) male, white country.”[[42]](#footnote-42) The anxiety over losing “their” country to those “other” people results in a highly moralistic stance that buttresses political intransigence against almost any government intervention that would address the hardship of those on the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy.

We might be tempted to say the intransigence against providing aid to those suffering the worst effects of the transformed economy is but indicative of a persistent and growing aversion on the political right to taking a Keynesian countercyclical approach to jump-starting the stagnant economy post–Great Recession. Yet even this aversion is consistently couched in public discourse more in moral than economic terms to the point of suggesting that it is un-Christian to take on more public debt, especially if it is to reward “other” people who are seen as not practicing personal responsibility and self-sufficiency. The metaphors used to denigrate debt created for purposes of aiding families in need are quite telling. The idea of the government helping families is frequently dismissed in terms of irresponsible household budgeting. The morally responsible family that lives within its means is the dominant metaphor that frames the intransigence as a moral issue fulfilling our promises to pay our debts and not impose burdens on anyone else (now or in the future).[[43]](#footnote-43)

Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) is the leading proponent of slashing social welfare programs because they require too much debt. He has stirred controversy with his comments on the culture of poverty leading poor people to not work enough to improve their economic situation. In early 2014, when discussing his budget proposals to cut social welfare programs, he said: “One reason that we still have poverty in the United States is that a lot of poor people are born lazy.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Ryan’s comments have been pointed to as examples of “dog-whistle politics,” where racial references are made implicitly.[[45]](#footnote-45)

The resistance to increasing government spending to stimulate the economy is therefore at its base a profoundly political stance not grounded in economic analysis at all. Instead, it is a moralistic argument reflective of deep anxieties about the changing demographics of the country. The resistance to aiding the poor is expressed as opposing a morally irresponsible act that rewards bad behavior by “other” people who do not play by white, middle-class rules of work and family. The fact that President Obama himself is not white only further heightens the anxiety that nonwhites are taking over the country and forcing whites to support their deviant social practices. (For instance, in 2012 perennial presidential candidate and Tea Party favorite, Rick Santorum allegedly said he did not want to “make black people's lives better by giving them somebody else's money.”) In the end, the Tea Party’s argument about the relationship of the state to the market is a highly racialized and moralistic one reflective of deep anxiety about social and cultural, as well as economic, precariousness of the white middle class in a changing society. For the Tea Party, changing demographics, politics, and economics combine to create a perfect storm of middle-class melancholia.

THE ETERNAL RETURN OF LEFT MELANCHOLIA

To be sure, melancholia is not a condition specific to the Right, let alone the entrepreneurs of the middle class in the Tea Party. While not preoccupied with the shame of keeping up appearances on behalf of the self-sufficient self, the Left has its own problems with melancholia that revolve more around issues of collective, rather than individual, action. In fact, it is arguably the case that the Left has been more vocal about the issue of melancholia in its ranks. “Left Melancholy” as Walter Benjamin first talked about it reflected disavowal of the futility of trying to sustain no longer viable practices of political action that were inappropriate for the current era.[[46]](#footnote-46) As a result, leftists were reduced to antiquarian exercises focused on maintaining the purity of political thought in ways that led them away from staying focused on what strategic actions for revolutionary change would be viable and appropriate in the current moment. Elisabeth Anker writes: “Left melancholy is akin to a process of reification, as habituated forms of leftist scrutiny drain the vitality and energetics of both the melancholic and the objects he holds on to, vitality necessary for sustaining the critical push for freedom in a dark and dangerous time. Diminishing revolutionary potential, left melancholy reflects the outward trappings that signify work for social change while its animating core is inert, empty and lifeless.”[[47]](#footnote-47)

As Benjamin noted of Marx’s analogy of revolutions as locomotives, perhaps they are passengers applying the emergency brake.[[48]](#footnote-48) There is evidence that Benjamin’s melancholic perspective haunts the progressive response to the political change today because it is arguably more often in resistance to changes negative trajectory.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Left melancholy lays behind much of the criticism that the Occupy Wall Street movement has incurred from those you would think would be its supporters. Occupy Wall Street when it arose was at first seen as an exciting and healthy development in participatory democracy. It gave voice to people’s discouragement with how the government was responding to the fallout from the Great Recession in ways that favored the investor class over everyone else. As economic hardship persisted well beyond the Great Recession, many began to wonder why there was no upsurge in protest beyond the crowds associated with Tea Party gatherings. Then, on September 17, 2011, protestors took over Zuccotti Park in lower Manhattan and Occupy Wall Street sprang to life. They were different than the Tea Party. They were diverse, young and old, students and the homeless, the unemployed from Wall Street as well as Main Street. Many were from the middle class.[[50]](#footnote-50) They mobilized and demonstrated in large numbers. As the protests persisted and spread to other cities, and then explicitly linked with protests already occurring around the globe, there emerged the mantra of “we are the 99 percent” that targeted the top “1 percent” who were benefiting at the expense of everyone else.[[51]](#footnote-51) The message was refined; but more importantly there was now a movement. Finally, the people rose up as an organized force, as Occupy Wall Street, and they made their discontent visible for all to see, demanding justice in the face of the injustice of it all. Occupy was at times playful. It enacted creative, even theatrical, performances in protests all over the country, on college campuses, in city parks, at government centers. It performed its street theater in the name of openly and honestly highlighting the loss of economic opportunity that came with the rise of the debt economy.

Nonetheless, all this performing was quickly dismissed as not serious organizing for political change. In spite of Occupy answering the call and filling this need, the prevailing view, not just on the left, is that Occupy failed and it did so because it was not very organized. It was characterized as a disorganized eruption of passionate dissent that lacked grounding in academic research on its key issue of inequality, which also explains why the movement never developed an explicit public policy agenda and remains to this day at best an amorphous collection of protestors who could never make concerted demands for change on the government. Criticism came from within Occupy as well as from without. Jodi Dean has written critically of how Occupy’s open, porous, decentralized, playful, and theatrical efforts at protest betrayed the long-standing approach on the left to build organized parties to contest the power of the privileged class:

And these massive events are more than just spectacles, more than momentary hints at the people’s will, when they are strengthened by the specific achievements of specific, targeted campaigns. In many ways, this has already been a key component of Occupy. Yet, too much movement rhetoric denounces centralization and celebrates locality such that people lose confidence in anything but the local and the community-based. . . . Collective power isn’t just coming together. It’s sticking together. And sticking together requires a willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of others. . . . In sum, the Occupy movement demonstrates why something like a party is needed insofar as a party is an explicit assertion of collectivity, a structure of accountability, an acknowledgment of differential capacities, and a vehicle for solidarity.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Dean sees the substitution of democracy for economic justice as its own melancholic practice. She asserts about the Left generally today but Occupy in particular:

It sublimates revolutionary desire to democratic drive, to the repetitious practices offered up as democracy (whether representative, deliberative, or radical). Having already conceded to the inevitably of capitalism, it noticeably abandons “any striking power against the big bourgeoisie,” to return to Benjamin’s language. For such a Left, enjoyment comes from its withdrawal from responsibility, its sublimation of goals and responsibilities into the branching, fragmented practices of micropolitics, self-care, and issue awareness. Perpetually slighted, harmed, and undone, this Left remains stuck in repetition, unable to break out of the circuits of drive in which it is caught, unable because it enjoys them. . . . If this Left is rightly described as melancholic—and I agree with [Wendy] Brown that it is—then its melancholia derives from the real existing compromises and betrayals inextricable from its history, its accommodations with reality, whether of nationalist war, capitalist encirclement, or so-called market demands.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Dean believes that Occupy frittered away the chance to create a sustained political movement aimed at overtaking state power and bending it toward the goals of social justice. She longs for a political party that will rise above the usual petty partisanship and stand for the people’s collective wishes that their common interests be enacted via state action. Yet this critique of Occupy reenacts the melancholia that Brown finds in left critics of grassroots protest politics in the current era.[[54]](#footnote-54) Left melancholia involves not just settling for reformist identity politics as a substitute for class-based radical mobilizing (as noted by Dean); it also involves nostalgically longing for one big movement organized along class lines in an era of more diversified forms of precarity (as noted by Brown). Much of the criticism of Occupy itself resonates with this sort of melancholia that bemoans the inability to continue to adhere to the classic standard for left anticapitalist organizing for revolutionary change.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Their melancholia over the loss of traditional class-based organized political action led critics away from appreciating that Occupy was a contemporaneous success as a social movement that had as its role in mobilizing the diverse members of the precariat, not the class-unified members of the proletariat. In the process, its job was to resist being co-opted into making public policy proposals that would only serve to undermine its main mission—to mobilize as many different people as possible by raising consciousness about the injustice of protecting the “1 percent” at the expense of ordinary people.[[56]](#footnote-56) In other words, Occupy’s critics conflated the different roles of protest and electoral politics for achieving political change.

Some criticism of Occupy has been more focused but is still reflective of left melancholia. In a volume of essays by different social scientists who for the most part bemoan Occupy as a missed opportunity, David Laitin asserts: “My . . . proposals, though elaborated in the mathematics of incentives and not in the psychology of rage, are in the spirit of Occupy and would play an important complementary role to Occupy’s symbolic protests in challenging an unacceptable status quo.”[[57]](#footnote-57) In other words, Occupy’s passion needs the reason of objective social science so that it can have an explicit agenda with concrete proposals, or otherwise it will fizzle in the failure of overwrought emotionalism.

Occupy’s critics often invoke an invidious comparison with the U.S. civil rights movement.[[58]](#footnote-58) Yet the civil rights movement was a long-term project that itself had its ups and downs. The road from the Montgomery bus boycott to Selma was punctuated by the March on Washington with periods of inaction in between. Protests fizzled after the Montgomery boycott only to be reignited after the dramatic events at Selma. The lesson from the civil rights movement is not just that you need a sustained, committed, organized group with an explicit agenda. It is also that you have to be patient, wait for opportunities to protest, and be organized as protesters to take advantage of them when they come. All the same, it is important to remember that the core of such a movement is protest and mobilization and not lobbying or electoral campaigning.

The civil rights movement was led by a number of related groups, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in particular. Yet the movement also relied heavily on the energy of youth, as embodied in the activism of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. These groups coalesced not around an explicit policy agenda so much as around mobilizing protesters to help raise consciousness about the injustice of racial apartheid in the United States. The two organizations also did not always agree on what to do when, and over time tensions developed between leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture). The movement was sustained by protests that increased the visibility of the issue, dramatized the injustice of segregation and racial discrimination, and eventually helped frame political discourse to the point that policy elites felt obligated to enact a series of civil rights laws.

In the debates about comparing Occupy favorably or unfavorably to the civil rights movement, an important point is context.[[59]](#footnote-59)That was then and this is now. The two movements not only have different issues but different demographics, different locales, and perhaps, most importantly, take place at different times with different political climates. Occupy can never replicate the civil rights movement for all these reasons. Instead, Occupy needs to think about what it can do regarding the issues of economic injustice that animated it in the first place and have evolved since. Those who practice left melancholia experience what Jacques Derrida called “time out of joint.”[[60]](#footnote-60) As Anker has insightfully noted, as implied in her comment quoted earlier, they continue to try to relive a lost past in ways that prevent them from being relevant to the times in which they live. Occupy’s role today, as compared to left movements of the past, I would argue, was to make visible the wide variety of people, young and old, single or with children, black and white, formerly middle class or persistently poor, who are being left by the wayside in a transformed economic system post the Great Recession—the “99 percent.”

OCCUPY, DEBT, AND THE WORK OF MOURNING

Melancholia arguably afflicts Occupy and limits its effectiveness in giving voice to the concerns of various groups that compose the precariat. Yet its theatrics is also a sign that it actually created the opportunity to work through and leave behind the morbid preoccupations of melancholia. The exuberance of Occupy’s demonstrations were dismissed by some as the extravagances of youth that ended up frittering away and eventually losing the opportunity to challenge corporate power in a more organized and sustained way. Nonetheless, the playfulness of many of the Occupy protests could be seen as manifestations of the healthier condition of honest mourning over the loss of economic opportunity in the debtor economy. Occupy owned its loss and paraded it proudly. Occupy protests were open demonstrations of mourning. Even with a fluid structure and an unspecified agenda, Occupy became an audible, and even often eloquent, voice crying out against economic injustice in the face of how Wall Street financiers had misbehaved in ways that took down the global economy and destroyed the livelihood of millions.[[61]](#footnote-61) Occupy was not in denial about how ordinary people, the “99 percent,” had been robbed of their economic futures by the privileged “1 percent.” Occupy owned its loss, paraded it, demonstrated it, and openly announced it to the world.

Regardless of the youth of many of the demonstrators, Occupy was all about giving voice to how ordinary people had been made precarious; it was never in denial at least about that, but instead openly presented itself as representatives of the ordinary people who had been marginalized by external forces producing an extraordinary economic transformation. This is but one way in which it was a middle-class movement, not unlike the Tea Party. Yet Occupy did not for the most part express its loss in a melancholic way. It did not internalize the lost object of the market and the marketable self to make it a loss of self-regard that must be disavowed. The main message from Occupy about what was happening was not that it was an issue of loss of face or loss of ego. The growing indebtedness of ordinary citizens was not a reflection of their moral failings as deficient citizen-subjects who could not adhere to the standard of middle-class values of personal responsibility.

Instead, the Occupiers often playfully performed their “precariatization” by highlighting that the expectations put on them were increasingly impossible to meet in an economy that was growing ever more unfair. To be sure, the issue of debt was critical for Occupy but not as an object of melancholia. Instead Occupy was doing the work of mourning when it discussed debt.[[62]](#footnote-62) Anker uses Freud again, this time to discuss the work of mourning post 9/11 about the loss of the ideal of the free, autonomous individual in ways that are relevant to the analysis here in distinguishing Occupy’s response from that of the Tea Party post–Great Recession: “Other possibilities include sustaining the acknowledgement that loss engenders: that the object of desire is gone, that one’s ideal is no longer tenable and perhaps was never viable. For Freud, this involves a mourning process that concludes by rerouting desire to a new, more tenable, more live object.”[[63]](#footnote-63)

Distinguishing Occupy’s work of mourning from the Tea Party’s melancholy is especially pertinent to their differences in dealing with issues of private and public debt. The debt issue is critical for it arguably is the specter that most ominously hangs over ordinary citizens’ anxieties about their ability to thrive economically post the Great Recession. Tayyab Mahmud has incisively noted how Foucault’s neoliberal governmentality operates through debt in the current era post–Great Recession.[[64]](#footnote-64) While Foucault was by no means a fan of Freud, his neoliberal governmentality is in fact much like the Freud’s superego that disciplines the ego in the melancholic personality. The superego of neoliberal governmentality instructs the ego to internalize the need to rationalize one’s inability to be a self-sufficient entrepreneurial self who leverages human capital to succeed in a market-centered society or risk facing the strictures of the state’s disciplinary regime.[[65]](#footnote-65) In the face of growing appreciation of one’s inability to realize this ideal, the self turns against itself, disavowing its desire and satisfying itself with substitutions such as pretending to be a capable, market-savvy actor by relying on recurring tax cuts and other allowances that prop up the image of the self-sufficient self that cannot be any longer sustained as a credible ideal.

For Mahmud, today the disciplining of the self-sufficient self is, however, not primarily enforced from either an internalized commitment or by the state’s threats of punishment but more from the external force imposed by oppressive levels of debt needed to pantomime the performance of the self-sufficient self. For Freud, the result was repression of a healthy ego; for Foucault the result is less repression than oppression where the ego knows more self-consciously its inability to act alternatively but cannot afford the risks associated with transgressing the disciplinary standards set for it.[[66]](#footnote-66) Debt disciplined the people not by repressing their egoistic desires (it was not internalized); instead debt disciplined people as an external force that oppressed them by weighing them down with obligations they consciously would like very much to be without. Debt did not internalize, it did not repress; it was an external oppressive force.

Mahmud’s main point, however, is that people have little choice regardless of how they see themselves since debt cycles have been critical to boosting the economy over the last few decades, as one debt-inflated bubble of growth burst only to be replaced by another. Without other sources for economic growth, the pattern has been to encourage incurring debt—credit card debt, mortgage debt, student debt, and medical debt in particular. Without debt, the ideal of the self-sufficient self could not be simulated. Yet periodically the debt bubble would burst, the economy would implode, and the shift to new forms of debt would need to be encouraged to recharge the hollowed-out economy. Economic growth in the postindustrial era, in the era where the financial industry would become the primary driver of U.S. economic growth, would increasingly come from soliciting debtors to borrow to bet on their future, to invest in their own human capital as the basis of their economic success. Yet that crushing debt would weigh heavily on homeowners with houses underwater, students with years of study but no degrees (or with degrees but no careers), patients without the means to cover the costs of their care, and most generally consumers who cannot repay the costs of their credit card purchases. The economy has come to depend on people incurring debts as bets on their economic futures, bets that increasingly must be written off as losses.[[67]](#footnote-67) Debt not only is a questionable source of fuel for the economic system; it is a powerful way of disciplining subordinate populations who must preoccupy themselves with servicing that debt or risk being disqualified from competing for the limited economic opportunities that might come their way in the future. Credit scores operate much like felony records, marking who is to be included and excluded from mainstream society. As Andrew Ross notes:

[T]he larger threat is to the workings of an operational democracy. A crushing debt burden stifles our capacity to think freely, act conscientiously and fulfill our democratic responsibilities. Too many young people now feel their future has been foreclosed before they have entered full adulthood. And, given the creditors’ goal of prolonging debt service to the grave, the burden of repayment is shifting disproportionately toward the elderly (many of whom now are routinely asked to cosign student loans). Democracies don’t survive well without a functional middle class or a citizenry endowed with an optional political imagination, and the test of a humane one is how it treats seniors when they outlast their capacity to earn a living wage.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Yet, Mahmud sees Occupy as potentially offering an effective site for resisting the disciplinary regime of debt associated with the new economy:

The crisis and the policy responses have also triggered resistance from below. From the Arab spring to Greek general strikes and from the Occupy Movement in the United States to mass demonstrations in London, new spaces and modes of resistance are being forged. However, the disciplinary function of debt is yet to find priority in the agendas of these movements. It is imperative that theory and praxis aimed at emancipatory transformation and global justice take account of the nature and magnitude of the contemporary crisis and the implications of policy responses on the offer. In particular, we must focus on new and refurbished disciplinary regimes that are reinforcing the discipline of debt on national policies to transfer all costs of the crisis to the working classes and the marginalized. Popular democratization of finance by managing finance as a public utility must be high on the agenda of popular movements. An urgent challenge is to explore agendas, coalitions, and organizational forms of resistive social movements suitable to pursue popular democratization of finance.[[69]](#footnote-69)

Mahmud’s concern has increasingly become a focus for those who had been active in Occupy, who over time have brought together various groups preoccupied with how their debt was weighing them down without offering them opportunity to be included in the changing economy.[[70]](#footnote-70) And as the street protests have subsided, Occupiershave turned to the issues of debt, not in a melancholic act of disavowal in service of propping up the charade of self-sufficient self in the age of precarity but in a more honest form of mourning over the real losses incurred. Out of Occupy has emerged a variety of efforts to mobilize people to fight back against the debt economy. For instance, noteworthy is the Rolling Jubilee and related initiatives to help people get out from under the debt they cannot cover.[[71]](#footnote-71) These initiatives are not a melancholic cover-up of the role of debt in the pantomime of the self-sufficient self that neoliberal governmentality enforces, but instead a more honest and very public avowal of how incurring unrealistic debts has become a prerequisite for participating in society today. The jubilant rhetoric of the Rolling Jubilee indicates that its relationship to debt is nothing like the fraught, guilt-ridden self-denial associated with the Tea Party’s attempt to resist working through its problematic relationship to the self-sufficient self in the era of neoliberal governmentality: “A bailout of the people by the people: Rolling Jubilee is a Strike Debt project that buys debt for pennies on the dollar, but instead of collecting it, abolishes it. Together we can liberate debtors at random through a campaign of mutual support, good will, and collective refusal. Debt resistance is just the beginning. Join us as we imagine and create a new world based on the common good, not Wall Street profits.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

Occupy openly embraces the reality of pervasive debt and seeks to deal with it forthrightly. In the process, it mourns the loss of the self-sufficient self-ideal rather than engaging in the melancholic practice of surreptitiously insisting that debt can substitute for acquired assets. It mourns but then it moves on from cries of protest to a rolling jubilee to strike the debt, from expressing grief over loss of economic opportunity to action to fight back against the debt economy, much like a New Orleans jazz funeral.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Both Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party targeted debt, public and private, as the prime issue confronting us economically. Yet Occupy has questioned the external conditions that give rise to the problem of private debt, while the Tea Party has targeted as immoral public debt that actually could serve to boost the economy and make individuals more able to repay their private debts in the future.[[74]](#footnote-74) As a result, even the arcane accounting issue of the debt ceiling for the federal government has become a way of shaming the government’s leaders to accept cutbacks in basic social welfare programs that are still needed post the Great Recession. The Tea Party’s approach to public debt is to treat it as a scandal that justifies shaming those who advocate it. Occupy’s approach to private debt, however, is to see it as having been unfairly imposed and needing to be addressed as an external imposition. In the case of the Tea Party, debt becomes yet another source for the self-flagellation associated with melancholia, while for Occupy debt is from external sources that in no way should make people feel lesser selves.[[75]](#footnote-75) Debt, more than taxes, has become the critical issue in the neoliberal economy, with the Tea Party and those who had been in Occupy approaching it in different ways reflective of grappling with middle-class melancholia.

CONCLUSION

After her failed vice presidential candidacy, Sarah Palin for a while talked in ways consistent with the Occupy movement.[[76]](#footnote-76) She called out the banks for insisting on being saved by government before their toxic assets irreparably poisoned their profitability, while ordinary Americans financially drown because they were sunk in debt from mortgages that left them underwater. As a darling of the Tea Party, Palin was showing that the Tea Partiers had the potential to direct their ire at the leaders of the financial industry who have been promoting and profiting from the debt economy. Yet Palin would eventually focus primarily on what she called “crony capitalism,” which made the problem seem largely the result of collusion between the government and corporate lobbyists. In the end, she even went so far as to accuse Occupy participants of being just more greedy and needy welfare recipients who wanted a bailout just like those bankers. Palin could have joined in the honest mourning of the passing away of the old economy that, while often very unfair to too many, still held out hope for a middle class that they could achieve a decent standard of living through stable employment. Yet Palin regressed to her disingenuous ways insisting that the middle class was just fine if it could be free of those freeloaders who wanted to live off government aid.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Nevertheless, there are deep affinities between Occupy and the Tea Party as middle-class movements, as much as partisan politics makes these ties less than apparent. Both are concerned about how the transformed economy is one that puts in jeopardy the middle-class ideal of the self-sufficient self. Both respond in ways that point, even if furtively, toward how a neoliberal governmentality is insisting on an intensified program or “responsibilization” where people are expected to entrepreneurially leverage their own human capital and become that self-sufficient self just when the economy is making it all the more difficult to enact that ideal. Both recognize that debt is a dangerous resource that increasingly desperate people must rely on if they are to even begin to try to make it in the transformed economy.

While Freud saw melancholia as a pathological response to loss compared with the healthier grieving associated with mourning, Benjamin saw them as more related.[[78]](#footnote-78) In the latter perspective, the differences between the responses of the Tea Party and Occupy are possibly more related than conventional politics is prepared to allow. In fact, the success of the Tea Party is in some respects a barometer of the failure of Occupy to effectively give voice to people’s discontent today. In reference to the rise of rightist movements and the simultaneous decline of the Left in the United States and Europe post–Great Recession, Slavoj Žižek suggests: “Walter Benjamin’s old thesis that behind every rise of fascism there is a failed revolution not only still holds today, but is perhaps more pertinent than ever.”[[79]](#footnote-79) The Tea Party fills the vacuum created by left melancholia. Yet it does so with its own politics of resentment. The Tea Party enacts a denial of middle-class melancholia that comes from insisting on a pantomime of self-sufficiency which ends up heightening the guilt over private debt and the shame of public debt. Occupy’s concerns about debt are less obsessive. It offers a way forward, the melancholic criticisms from the Left notwithstanding. It engages in the work of mourning that more directly confronts how the debt economy works to keep people down. If the Tea Party could find a way to overcome its middle-class melancholia, it could join with those who had been active in Occupy in doing that important work of mourning so that a stronger populist uprising would result. Anything less is likely not to be enough as debt will continue to enforce its discipline, in the process shutting down the potential for political mobilization.

1. See Robert Reich, “Robert Reich on What's Really Destroying the American Middle Class,” *Alternet*, September 29, 2014: http://www.alternet.org/economy/robert-reich-whats-really-destroying-american-middle-class.Pew Research Center, *Most Say Government Policies Since the Recession Have Done Little to Help Middle Class, Poor: ‘Partial’ Recovery Seen in Jobs, Household Incomes*, March 2015,http://www.people-press.org/files/2015/03/03-04-15-Economy-release.pdf**.** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Andrew Ross, *Creditocracy: And the Case for Debt Refusal* (New York: OR Books, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a discussion of the political implications of these economic developments, see Jacob Hacker, *The Great Risk Shift: The Assault on American Jobs, Families, Health Care, and Retirement—and How You Can Fight Back* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1989). I can think of no better depiction of this class-status anxiety than René Magritte’s painting *Golconda*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The turn to melancholia to capture society’s mood post–Great Recession spans literature, film, and the arts more generally. An overly allegorical and eschatological rendition can be seen in the Lars von Trier 2011 film *Melancholia* (Zentropia, Denmark) which can be loosely interpreted as suggesting the end of the capitalist way of life as the equivalent to the end of the world (especially for some particularly isolated, privileged people). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. 14, (1914–1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works,* James Stachey, ed., (New York: Vintage Books, 2001 [1917]), pp. 237–58. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ilit Ferber, “Melancholy Philosophy: Freud and Benjamin,” *E-rea: Revue Électronique d’Études Sur Le Monde Anglophone—Discourses of Melancholy* 4, 1 (2006), paragraph 1: http://erea.revues.org/413. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Ferber, “Melancholy Philosophy,” and “Leibniz’s Monad: A Study in Melancholy and Harmony,” in *Philosophy’s Moods: The Affective Grounds of Thinking*, Hagi Kenaan and Ilit Ferber, eds. (Dordrecht: Springer Press, 2011), pp. 53–68. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ilit Ferber, *Philosophy and Melancholy: Benjamin’s Early Reflections on Theater and Language* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). Von Trier’s film *Melancholia* suggests a deep anxiety about an impending doom for people who in spite of their wealth were never satisfied that they had come to possess the safety and comfort they had desired. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Elisabeth Anker, “Heroic Identifications: Or, ‘You Can Love Me Too—I Am So Like the State,’” *Theory & Event* 15, 1 (2012): https://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/theory\_and\_event/v015/15.1.anker.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. On the self-hatred that comes with the splitting of the melancholic self, Ferber relies on Walter Benjamin to distinguish pathological melancholia from melancholy as a generic human condition, which she says has a much longer history and “is a mood that allows one privileged access to truth and meaning.” See Ferber, “Leibniz’s Monad,” p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Edward McClelland, “RIP, the Middle Class: 1946–2013,” *Alterne*t, September 20, 2013: http://www.salon.com/2013/09/20/rip\_the\_middle\_class\_1946\_2013/. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Robert Reich, “Where Is the Angry Middle Class Revolution?” *Salon,* January 27, 2014, http://www.salon.com/2014/01/27/robert\_reich\_3\_reason\_why\_we\_havent\_had\_a\_progressive\_revolution\_yet\_partner/; and Francis Fukuyama, “The Middle Class Revolution,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 28, 2013, http://m.us.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323873904578571472700348086?mobile=y. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For analysis of survey data demonstrating the effects of economic shocks on personal worries and both on policy attitudes, see Jacob S. Hacker, Philipp Rehm, and Mark Schlesinger, “The Insecure American: Economic Experiences, Financial Worries, and Policy Attitudes*,” Perspectives on P*olitics 11, 1 (2013): 23–49. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Joseph E. Stiglitz, “A Tax System Stacked against the 99 Percent,” *New York Tim*es, April 15, 2013, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/14/a-tax-system-stacked-against-the-99-percent/?ref=opinion. Also see Robert J. Samuelson, “The Twilight of Entitlement,” *Washington Post,* April 28, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/robert-samuelson-the-end-of-entitlement/2013/04/28/90356b1a-ae90-11e2-8bf6-e70cb6ae066e\_story.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. On the role of demonization of others in the name of vouchsafing one’s precarious political identity, see Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie: And Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New and Dangerous Class* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For an insightful analysis of how changes in fiction in recent years reflect a melancholic turn, see David Marcus, “Post-Hysterics: Zadie Smith and the Fiction of Austerity,” *Dissent* (Spring 2013): http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/post-hysterics-zadie-smith-and-the-fiction-of-austerity. Marcus writes about Zadie Smith’s fiction: “but in our present moment, we need fiction that is dedicated to exposing the ways in which we can no longer realize ourselves—the ways in which we are just not that free. Smith’s NW—a novel that captures the taxing human and social costs of austerity—might help lead the way. If nothing else, its pointed sense of direction reminds us just how lost we now are.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Natasha Singer, “In the Sharing Economy, Workers Find Both Freedom and Uncertainty,” *New York Times*, August 16, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/17/technology/in-the-sharing-economy-workers-find-both-freedom-and-uncertainty.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Tayyab Mahmud, “Debt and Discipline,” *American Quarterly* 64, 3 (2012): 469–94. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. On neoliberal governmentality, I rely on but also part from Mitchell Dean and Frederick Valladsen, *State Phobia and Civil Society: The Legacy of Michel Foucault* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, forthcoming). See Andrew Dilts, “From ‘Entrepreneur of the Self’ to ‘Care of the Self’: Neo-liberal Governmentality and Foucault’s Ethics,” *Foucault Studies* 12 (October 2011):130–46. The quintessential strategy of neoliberal governmentality is “assets building,” whereby each person is expected to save, accumulate capital, and build assets for long-term financial well-being. See Michael Sherraden, ed., *Inclusion in the American Dream: Assets, Poverty, and Public Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). For a poignant example of promoting the kind of “subjectivation” associated with neoliberal governmentality, see Bree Kessler, “Home Run: How Neoliberalism Took Over Home-Makeover Shows,” *Bitch* 57 (Winter 2012): 38–41. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon (Pocket Communism)* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 173. , where she asserts: “in contrast with desire, drive isn’t a quest for a fantastic lost object; it’s the force loss exerts on the field of desire. Drives don’t circulate around a space that was once occupied by an ideal, impossible object. Rather, drive is the sublimation of desire as it turns back in on itself.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See Christopher S. Parker and Matt Baretto, *Change They Can’t Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); and Kate Zernike and Megan Thee-Brenan, “Poll Finds Tea Party Backers Wealthier and More Educated,” *New York Times*, April 14, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/15/us/politics/15poll.html?src=me&ref=general>. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. On the performative dimensions of anger as manifested in the Tea Party and paradigmatically represented in Rick Santelli’s CNN tirade, see Holloway Sparks, “Mamma Grizzlies and the Guardians of the Republic: The Democratic and Intersectional Politics of Anger in the Tea Party Movement,” *New Political Science*, August 30, 2014, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07393148.2014.945252#.VAX4rPldWPs>. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See on Flickr, http://www.flickr.com/photos/susanad813/3447487250/. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Opposition to immigration reform is high among members of the Tea Party in no small part due to anxiety about how immigration reform would tip the demographic and, by extension, electoral balance against them. See Alexander Bolton and Russell Berman, “Immigration Reform Battle Centers on Conservative Tea Party Bloc,” *The Hill*, January 26, 2014, <http://thehill.com/homenews/house/196427-the-gop-lawmakers-who-may-decide-fate-of-immigration-reform>. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Kristen A. Lee, “Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal Tells GOP ‘Stop Being the Stupid Party,’” *New York Daily News*, January 25, 2013, http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/gov-bobby-jindal-gop-stop-stupid-party-article-1.1247645. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Zernike and Thee-Brenan, “Poll Finds Tea Party Backers Wealthier and More Educated.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Suzanne Mettler, *The Submerged State: How Invisible Government Policies Undermine American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See Sanford F. Schram, *After Welfare: The Culture of Postindustrial Social Polic*y (New York: University Press, 2002), pp. 149–84. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Stiglitz, “A Tax System Stacked against the 99 Percent.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The relationship of private debt to public debt is not just a U.S. problem, as the sovereign debt crisis in Europe has shown. Even the usually fiscally prudent Netherlands increasingly cannot meet its European Union debt limits. Fiscal prudence with social protections as a backstop has resulted in both becoming relics of the past in the face of a massive housing bubble bursting. See Christoph Schult and Anne Seith, “The Netherlands Falls Prey to Economic Crisis,” *Speigel Online International*, April 2, 2013, http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/economic-crisis-hits-the-netherlands-a-891919.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. William E. Connolly, *Christianity and Capitalism, American Style* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 39–68. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Fred Block and Margaret R. Somers, *The Power of Market Fundamentalism: Karl Polanyi’s Critique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Block and Somers, *The Power of Market Fundamentalism*, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Quoted in Block and Somers, *The Power of Market Fundamentalism*, pp. 30–31. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes,* 50th anniversary ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 10–11. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Grover Norquist, founder and president of Americans for Tax Reform, pushed his Tax Protection Pledge, which was signed by 95 percent of Republicans in Congress before 2012 and is a forerunner of the Tea Party antitax stance. He famously once said: “I’m not in favor of abolishing the government. I just want to shrink it down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub” (http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Grover\_Norquist). Norquist’s attempt to bankrupt the government by starving it of needed tax revenue that then could help the middle class cover its debts represents the quintessential example of someone who enacts the drive of middle-class melancholia long after the desire to realize the idealized self-sufficient self has gone away from an increasingly anxious and precarious middle class. See Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of the Republican Conserva*tism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Sonia Smith, “Drug Tests for Welfare Recipients,” *Texas Monthly*, March 27, 2013, http://www.texasmonthly.com/story/drug-tests-welfare-recipients; and Joe Soss, “Penalties Will Hurt Students, Families,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, April 4, 2013, http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2013/apr/04/joe-soss-penalties-will-hurt-students-families/. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See Josh Feldman, “Fox News IDs, Reports New Details on Stenographer Who Went on Bizarre Rant on House Floor,” *Mediaite*, October 17, 2013, http://www.mediaite.com/tv/fox-news-ids-reports-new-details-on-stenographer-who-went-on-bizarre-rant-on-house-floor/. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Parker and Baretto, Change They Can’t Believe In, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Paul Krugman, “The Austerity Agenda,” *New York Times*, May 12, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/01/opinion/krugman-the-austerity-agenda.html?\_r=0 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See Ian Haney Lopez, “Is Paul Ryan Racist?” *Politico Magazine*, March 14, 2014, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/03/is-paul-ryan-racist-104687_Page2.html#.U01ZPlc_RSB>. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. See Ian Haney Lopez, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See Wendy Brown, “Resisting Left Melancholy,” *Boundary* 2, 26 (1999): 19–27. For a recent Hollywood film on left melancholia and the guilt over giving up the struggle for revolutionary transformation of the United States, see Robert Redford’s *The Company You Keep* (Voltage Pictures, Los Angeles, 2012). See Kelly Candaele, “The Foam on a Sea of Rage: The Weather Underground, ‘The Company You Keep,’ and What to Read Instead,” *Los Angeles Review of Books,* April 21, 2013, http://lareviewofbooks.org/article.php?id=1599. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Elisabeth Anker, “Left Melodrama*,” Contemporary Political Theory* 11, 2 (2012): 133. For Anker, melodrama is a useful idiom for articulating melancholic preoccupations with the Manichean struggle between the rivaling classes of haves and have-nots. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, vol. 4, 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 402. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Benjamin Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ruth Milkman, Stephanie Luce, and Penny Lewis, *Changing the Subject: A Bottom-Up Account of Occupy Wall Street* (New York: The Murphy Institute, City University of New York, 2013): <http://sps.cuny.edu/filestore/1/5/7/1_a05051d2117901d/1571_92f562221b8041e.pdf>. This reports provides empirical evidence the authors use to indicate the middle-class representation in both the Tea Party and Occupy: “[T]he Tea Party is dominated by older whites, including many retired people (who are thus also ‘biographically available,’ at the other end of life), and focuses much of its energy on influencing candidates for elected office, with enormous funding from right-wing advocacy groups. As we have seen, Occupy has a much younger profile, its supporters are more highly educated (although many Tea Party members did attend college, contrary to popular belief).” [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. The focus on the 1 percent emerged prior to Occupy in the research Thomas Piketty conducted with Emanuel Saez and others. See Timothy Shenk, “Thomas Piketty and Millennial Marxists on the Scourge of Inequality,” *The Nation,* April 14, 2014, http://www.thenation.com/article/179337/thomas-piketty-and-millennial-marxists-scourge-inequality. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Dean, *Communist Horizon*, p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Dean, *Communist Horizon*, p. 236. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Brown, “Resisting Left Melancholy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. See Michael Kazin, “Anarchism Now: Occupy Wall Street Revives an Ideology,” *New Republic*, November 7, 2011, [www.tnr.com/article/politics/97114/anarchy-occupy-wall-street-throwback](http://www.tnr.com/article/politics/97114/anarchy-occupy-wall-street-throwback). Kazin’s concern is that Occupy reflects an excessive willingness to just let people express themselves rather than organizing around an explicit agenda for change. This critique resonates with Dean’s even if it comes from a different political position. See Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, pp. 236-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See Brown, “Resisting Left Melancholy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. David Laitin, “Political Remedies to Economic Inequality,” in *Occupy the Future*, David Grusky, Doug McAdam, Rob Reich, and Debra Satz, eds. (Boston: Boston Review Books, 2013), pp. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Gloria Browne-Marshall, “‘Occupy Wall Street’ Is No Civil Rights Movement*,” InsightNews.com*, December 14, 2011, http://insightnews.com/news/8270-occupy-wall-street-is-no-civil-rights-movement. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Whither the Occupy Wall Street Movement?” *The Root*, February 4, 2012, http://www.theroot.com/buzz/whither-occupy-wall-street-movement. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Frances Fox Piven, “Occupy! And Make Them Do It,” *The Nation*, April 2, 2012, http://www.thenation.com/article/166821/occupy-and-make-them-do-it. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. On the “work of mourning” regarding debt as in paying homage to what has been lost, see Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, pp. 61–95. Also see Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Anker, “Heroic Identifications.” [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Mahmud, “Debt and Discipline.” Also see Ross, *Creditocracy*. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Regarding neoliberal governmentality as centered promoting the entrepreneurial self who leverages his or her human capital to become a personally responsible, self-sufficient self or risks being subject to the state’s disciplinary regime, see Andrew Dilts, *Punishment and Inclusion: Race, Membership, and the Limits of American Liberalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), Chapter 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. On Foucault’s focus on oppression as opposed to Freud’s emphasis on repression, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1, An Introduction,* 5th ed. (New York: Vintage, 1990), pp. 15–16. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. The preoccupation with debt post–Great Recession was immortalized by Jimmy Fallon with Brian Williams and company on Late Night, in “Slow Jam the News: The Debt Ceiling,” December 3, 2014 http://www.latenightwithjimmyfallon.com/video/slow-jam-the-news-debt-ceiling/n32088/. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Andrew Ross, “Creditocracy or Democracy?” *Aljazeera America*, May 10, 2014, http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/5/credit-card-debtclassoccupycreditocracy.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Mahmud, “Debt and Discipline,” pp. 487–88. Also see Joseph E. Stiglitz, “Student Debt and the Crushing of the American Dream,” *New York Times*, May 12, 2013, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/05/12/student-debt-and-the-crushing-of-the-american-dream/?smid=fb-share. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Occupy’s diversity parallels the diversity of the Tea Party, with both having a significant group coming from the middle class, in the case of Occupy that being younger professionals and students who are concerned about how the transformed economy is denying them careers at that stratum. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Rolling Jubilee, “A Bailout of the People by the People,” http://rollingjubilee.org/The antiglobalization movement of the prior decade focused on debt forgiveness for Third World countries struggling to conform to repayment plans imposed by the International Monetary Fund. David Graeber envisioned this effort as analogous to a “biblical jubilee,” as in a sabbatical year where the land is not tilled. See David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn, New York: Melville House, 2011), p. 2, http://libcom.org/files/\_\_Debt\_\_The\_First\_5\_000\_Years.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Rolling Jubilee, “A Bailout of the People by the People,” <http://rollingjubilee.org/>. Also see Astra Taylor, “A Strike Against Student Debt,” *New York Times*, February 27, 2015: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/28/opinion/a-strike-against-student-debt.html?_r=0>. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. The shift from Occupy protests to the Rolling Jubilee parallels a New Orleans jazz funeral march, first solemn on the way to the burial ground but then jubilant in song on the way back in the name of carrying on. See Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 61–63. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. On the Right’s insistence that government debt is immoral, see Paul Krugman, “Immorality, Debt, and Fiscal Policy,” *New York Times*, March 31, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. While Jacques Derrida played with Freud’s mourning-melancholy distinction, Tammy Clewell notes: “Derrida also argues for an understanding [of] mourning as an affirmative incorporation of the lost other, emphasizing that we internalize lost loves at the same time the lost other cannot be fully assimilated in the mourner’s psyche. While recognizing that otherness in the self may give rise to forms of melancholy depression, Derrida also argues that the mourning subject ‘welcomes’ its own bereaved decentering as the very condition of ‘hospitality, love or friendship.’” See Tammy Clewell, “Mourning beyond Melancholia: Freud’s Psychoanalysis of Loss,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association,* 52, 1 (2004): 43-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. See Sarah Palin, *America by Heart: Reflections on Family, Faith and Flag* (New York: Harper, 2010), p. 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. “In Florida, Palin Criticizes Occupy Protesters, Says They Want Bailout,” *HT Politics*, November 4, 2011, http://politics.heraldtribune.com/2011/11/04/in-florida-palin-criticizes-occupy-protesters-says-they-want-bailout/. Palin’s comments anticipated presidential candidate Mitt Romney’s infamous 2012 private comment to wealthy campaign donors that the “47 percent” of Americans who did not pay any taxes were voting for President Barack Obama out of a sense of entitlement as victims that the government should take care of them. See Geoffrey Dunn, “‘If You Know What I Mean’: The Crony Capitalism of Sarah Palin,” *Huffington Post*, June 15, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/geoffrey-dunn/if-you-know-what-i-mean-t\_b\_1601185.html; and Alfredo Quintana, “I am the 99 Percent and the 47 Percent—and anything but the Romney-Percent,” *Huffington Post*, September 18, 2012: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alfredo-quintana/i-am-the-99-percent-and-t\_b\_1893916.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Ferber, “Melancholy Philosophy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Slavoj Žižek, “Only a Radicalised Left Can Save Europe,” *New Statesman*, June 25, 2014, http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/06/slavoj-i-ek-only-radicalised-left-can-save-europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)