



Whose Side Are We On?

Archiving the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street
Movements

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Summary

- Brief examination of two movements and archiving efforts towards both
- Findings: Tea Party is woefully underdocumented, while those who are archiving the Occupy movement face many difficulties, but are hesitant to accept help from outside institutions
- Problems have roots in public misunderstanding of archival community

The Tea Party



- Formed in 2009
- Primarily concerned with limiting government power and spending
- De-centralized structure

Occupy Wall Street

- Began in September of 2011
- Various motivations
- But overall message is to inspire political change through citizen action



Occupy Wall Street

- Decentralized movement
- New York became de facto geographical center



Spencer Platt/Getty Images

Archiving the Tea Party

- Not many articles about archiving the Tea Party, as opposed to archiving Occupy, which had a lot of media coverage
- Efforts to “document” Tea Party were mostly attempts to prove that Tea Party was front for racism and bigotry

Some semantics...

- Documenting: Journalists and photographers document events and report back to public
- Collecting: Actively gathering materials created *at* protests or *by* participants
- Archives: Just try to search for “Tea Party Archives” on Google.

Archiving the Tea Party

Smithsonian issued press release announcing it would be collecting Occupy materials:

“Recent acquisitions include materials from... the Tea Party rally in March 2010, Glenn Beck’s ‘Restoring Honor’ rally...and most recently from the American Conservative Union’s CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference) in February [2011].”

Statement: Occupy Wall Street Protests Collecting, The National Museum of American History, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/news/pressrelease.cfm?key=29&newskey=1417>

Conservative Reactions

“While the Smithsonian purports there’s no plan to display these stinky relics, when the time is right they’ll furnish the trashy artifacts to assist in the indoctrination of our nation’s children....We must continue to fight, lest the Left rewrite our history by glorifying Occupy squalor.”

“Smithsonian collects Occupy Wall Street materials” on The Right Scoop, November 12, 2011, <http://www.therightscoop.com/smithsonian-collects-occupy-wall-street-materials/>

Conservative Reactions

- “I don’t remember them collecting any memorabilia from the tea party movement. All we heard was that they are racists anti Americans...”
- “Yeah I didn’t see ANY record keepers at the 9/12 tea party in DC where there were over a million of us there. This about actually keeping records? Seems like that might have been a recordable moment, but alas...”

Lucas Zellers, “Smithsonian ‘Sent Representatives’ to Collect ‘Occupy’ Memorabilia to ‘Document Spirit of American Democracy,’” November 11, 2011,
<http://cnsnews.com/news/article/smithsonian-sent-representatives-collect-occupy-memorabilia-document-spirit-american>

Archiving the Tea Party

Project by A.J. Bauer, a doctoral student in American Studies at NYU

- Attending the Tea Party, an archive by A.J. Bauer, <http://historianseye.commons.yale.edu/a-j-bauer-contributor-archive/>
- 21 interviews and almost 300 photographs resulting from interactions with Tea Party participants in New York, Massachusetts, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C.

A.J. Bauer – Attending the Tea Party

- Ethnographic field research
- Recognizes project may one day be used by researchers
- Does this count as archiving?



The Hillbilly Report

- James Pence (Hillbilly) began documenting right-wing politics in Kentucky in November 2008
- Attended Tea Party protests in 2009-2010, took photographs and video
- Claims that the collected media show that “racism is alive and well and it’s found a home in Right Wing America.”

Archiving Occupy

- Three approaches
 - Internal
 - Occupy members themselves documenting their activities
 - External
 - Museums/archives going to protests and collecting materials, or websites that aggregate photos and videos
 - Collaborative
 - Institutions lending support while Occupy members do the collecting

Archiving Occupy

- None of these approaches are completely satisfactory for all parties involved
- Occupy members do not want to give up control of their stories
- A distrust of archival institutions – which are seen as part of the “Establishment” – is at the root of the issue

Internal Efforts

- Difficulty with both logistics and philosophies of collecting
 - Storage space is expensive
 - How to convince people that signs and pamphlets are worth saving?

Internal Efforts

- An-Archives
 - Jeremy Bold, Librarian at New York University's Bobst Library
 - Tumblr, space on Interoccupy.net, wiki
 - “An open-sourced archive: of, by, and for the people.’

Internal Efforts

- Anarchives



This sign is archived! Word.

[likethemilkyway](#):

|| We are the Ninety Nine
|| NYC Nov2011

Internal Efforts

- Archives Working Group
 - Founded by Jeremy Bold and Amy Roberts, LIS student at Queen's College
 - Both archivists and non-archivists
 - Many members in Working Group have trouble understanding the value of collecting analog materials and are more interested in oral histories and digital archiving

External efforts

- Smithsonian
- New York Historical Society
- Archives Working Group is leery
 - Can institutions that cater to the establishment be trusted to properly document and preserve materials from groups that are trying to subvert the establishment?

Compromise?

- Archives Working Group would be responsible for physical custodianship, arrangement, and care of materials...
- But NYU's Tamiment Library would legally own the collection(s)
- Is that enough?

Concerns of Occupy Members

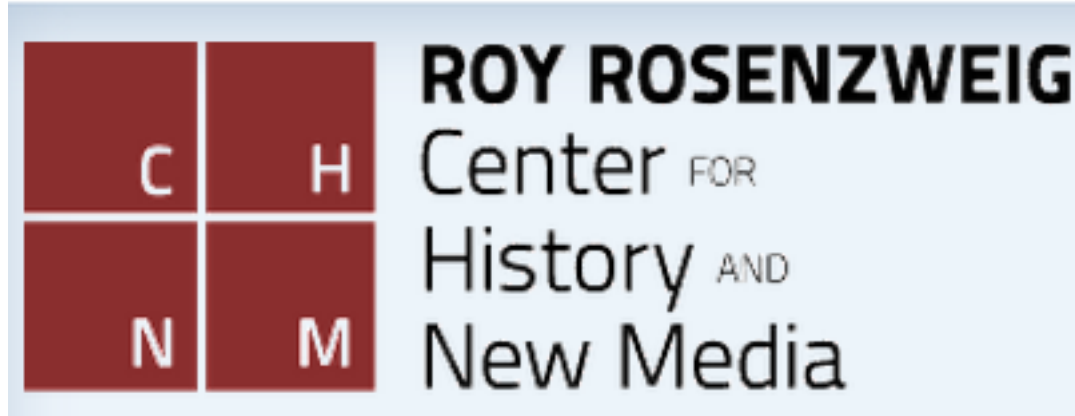
- Losing ownership of narrative
- But need money in order to maintain own archives
- No funding = donate collection somewhere
- If collection is donated to an institution, will materials be inaccessible?

Digital Archives

- **Activist Archivists**
 - Founded by Howard Besser and students at NYU's Moving Image Archive Program (MIAP)
- Digital nature of records allows them to be more easily archived than analog counterparts
- Also allows more of the movement to be represented in documentary record



- Collaborates with:
 - WITNESS
 - Tamiment Library
 - Archives Working Group
 - Internet Archive
 - Archive-It
 - Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media
 - Moving Image Archive Program



- Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (CHNM) at George Mason University
- Mission:
 - Using “digital media and computer technology to democratize history—to incorporate multiple voices, reach diverse audiences, and encourage popular participation in presenting and preserving the past.”

About, The Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media,
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/about/>



- Occupyarchive.org is “an effort to collect, preserve, and share the stories and born-digital materials of Occupy Wall Street and the associated Occupy movements around the world.”
- Encourages visitors to contribute their own content

Announcing OccupyArchive.org, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/news/announcing-occupyarchive-org/>

Findings

- Efforts to document both movements have been unsatisfactory
- Archiving activities for Tea Party have been minimal and carried out by non-archivists
- Number of efforts to archive Occupy is rather overwhelming

Discussion

- Leaderless, horizontal nature of Tea Party and Occupy movements present challenge for collecting
- Documents such as official correspondence, meeting minutes, financial records, or any other materials created in the normal course of business may not always be generated or retained

Discussion

- Most records are electronic
- There's been a lot of focus on collecting digital *media*, but not so much on electronic records
- Collected materials have focused on the protests themselves while excluding the larger context of the movement that might be discussed amongst members at non-protest events.

The Big Question

Why has so much effort gone into archiving Occupy, but not the Tea Party?

A few hypotheses...

- Tea Party events more infrequent
- Tea Party often considered “fringe,” whereas Occupy garnered more attention and perhaps legitimacy
- Many archivists seem to be politically left-leaning
 - Is it possible that archivists dismissed the Tea Party as a whole?

A few hypotheses...

- Occupy is, in a word, “cool.”
- So are we looking at Occupy more because it’s cool?
 - Are we trying to follow potential research trends?

Remember what Ham said...

“Most researchers are caught in their own concerns and do not worry about all the history that needs to be written; yet in terms of documentary preservation this is precisely what the archivist must do. Small wonder, then, that archival holdings too often reflected narrow research interests rather than the broad spectrum of human experience. If we cannot transcend these obstacles, then the archivist will remain at best nothing more than a weathervane moved by the changing winds of historiography.”

F. Gerald Ham, “The Archival Edge,” *The American Archivist*, 38.1 (January 1975), 8.

A few hypotheses...

Demographics

- Occupy movements counts many librarians and archives in its ranks
- Figures for demographics of Tea Party are not as readily apparent
 - Tea Party is against excessive government spending, and archives and libraries are often first publicly funded institutions to receive budget cuts

A few hypotheses...

Demographics

- Occupy tends to attract younger participants
- Occupy movement therefore lends itself to more documentation, albeit digital, than the Tea Party might

A few hypotheses...

A comment on a New York Times article about archiving Occupy asked:

“I wonder if any archivists are preserving the history of the Tea Party movement which has had a far greater impact on the American polity than has the Occupy movement [...] Failure to document the Tea Party would be indicative of a bias within the archival profession.” –pak152

<http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/02/occupy-wall-street-from-the-streets-to-the-archives/>

A few hypotheses...

“Red” replied:

“The Smithsonian, for one, and the Internet Archive [. . .] In the case of the New York Historical Society, OWS is a pervasive force in the city in ways the Tea Party is not [. . .] What is different about Occupy is that those within the movement are making active efforts to archive their history as it is happening. If Tea Party supporters want to see their history preserved they are certainly empowered with the means and support to do so. **But the effort must come from within.** Particularly if they do not want their tax dollars going to government-funded institutions, many of which are archives.” (Emphasis added)

<http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/05/02/occupy-wall-street-from-the-streets-to-the-archives/>

Discussion

Questions to ponder:

- Whose responsibility is it?
- Have archivists shown a bias toward left-leaning politics by concentrating so many archiving efforts on the Occupy movement but not the Tea Party?
- How does that affect our public image?
- How will that affect the documentary record that is preserved for future scholars?

Discussion

- Archivists are clearly on Occupy's side
- And it's obvious
- And that's a problem

Discussion

- Distrust of archival institutions is present in both groups
 - Tea Partiers see those institutions as having liberal bias
 - Occupy members see them as being proponents of the Establishment

What to do?

- Must engage in more outreach and advocacy
- Must ensure that collections across the country form a representative documentary record
 - More communication between repositories



THANK YOU!

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