

Occupiers or Liberators?

By [Frank Islam](#). [Huffington post](#): November 4, 2011

When the United States military invaded Iraq in 2003, many of that nation's citizens looked at and referred to them as "occupiers". We preferred to see and call ourselves "liberators."

Today a group in the United States that labels itself "occupiers" has taken up temporary residence on Wall Street and major streets in other cities across the country. In our opinion, these so-called occupiers also deserve the appellation "liberators".

Unlike our military, this rag tag army is a motley crew. It is comprised of citizens of all types and stripes including socialists, environmentalists, professional protesters, the recently unemployed, and college graduates who can't find a job. They lack a unity of purpose and a common vision.

In spite of this, they have begun a liberation movement because they have sparked a national dialogue about the current state of the American condition. This movement will not be complete until the silent majority weigh in over the next several months and most importantly in the national elections next November.

George Will wrote a column early this year in which he stated "America is a creedal nation and the creed is ...a recurring source of national introspection, discontent, self-indictment and passionate politics." Will noted that according to the late historian Samuel Huntington's book, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (1981) by 1980 America had had four "periods of creedal passion" -- the revolutionary era (1770's), the Jacksonian era (1830's), the Progressive era (1900-1920), and the 1960's.

Will observed that we are now in another period of creedal passion. And, he commented approvingly, "Today, the general conservatism of this center-right country and especially the tea party impulse demand renewed seriousness about the creed's core skepticism about government."

We agree with Will that we are indeed in a creedal period but disagree with him about the center right nature of the nation and the extent to which the tea party represents any one's interests or creed other than their own.

Creedal periods have arcs. The tea party movement anchors the extreme right end of the arc. The occupiers anchor the left end. The ultimate shape of the arc and the results from this creedal period will be determined by those in the middle. The citizens in the center will decide the end of this journey. And, history has shown that they tend to be either center right or center left depending on the nature of the issue and the tenor of the times.

The tea party has been complimented by some for its concentrated focus and desire to work within the system. The occupiers have been criticized for not having an agenda and for working outside of rather than through the system.

Here's an alternative perspective. The tea partiers are "occupiers" who have gained control of the Republican Party. They want to use that control as a minority to dictate absolutes to the majority on issues such as how to resolve the deficit and debt crisis and an increasingly prominent role for religion in government. The occupiers are "first amendment advocates", an eclectic bunch who have begun to call the question on the jobless recovery, income inequality, and the distribution of wealth and power in our country.

The tea party folks want to close down the conversation and limit that which we discuss. The occupiers want to open up the debate and argument and then leave it up to us as citizens to make the decisions on those issues that matter. It may look a whole lot messier but that is the heart of democracy and as Professor Huntington called it in the title of his book, *The Promise of Disharmony*.

Fortunately, as we move forward in this creedal period, much of the bloom has gone off the tea party rose for the public at large. As professors Robert Putnam and David Campbell noted in an August op-ed for the *New York Times*, "In April 2010, ...a survey found that 18 percent of Americans had an unfavorable opinion of the [tea party]...14 months later...opponents have more than doubled to 40 percent."

That's not to say that we as citizens aren't becoming more conservative in these economically troubled times. It is to say that we don't want somebody else's solutions.

We want to participate in the dialogue and problem-solving. We will be given that chance over the course of the next year up to and through the elections. The issues are now being fully framed and explored. It's no longer just about smaller government, social conservatism and debt reduction. Other critical topics are being brought front and center.

That's the way it should be in America -- a center nation. Thanks to the "liberating" acts of the "occupiers" the national conversation has been expanded, enriched and enhanced. We as Americans who have seen the progress that has been made because of past occupations -- sometimes peaceful and sometimes violent -- should want it no other way.