

o'clock is when Glenn Beck comes on, warning from a studio that he likes to call the "doom room" about the return of a Marxist fifth column.

Seely wore a muted plaid shirt, rumpled khakis, and large, round glasses that seemed to magnify his curiosity, a trait that he attributed to his training as an engineer—an urge to understand the way things work. He told me that he used to listen to Beck on the radio, before Beck got his Fox show. "I didn't like him," he said. "He was always making fun of people. You know, he's basically a comedian. But the reason I like him now is he's kind of had a mind-set change. Instead of making fun of everybody, he started asking himself questions. His point was 'Get out there, talk to your neighbor, see what they feel. Don't sit back under your tree boohooing.'" The Bulldog's gang was a collection of citizens who were, as one of them put it, "tired of talking to the TV." So they watched Beck together, over beer, and then spent an hour consoling one another, although lately their personal anxieties had overtaken the more general ones of the host on the screen, and Beck's chalkboard lectures about the fundamental transformation of the Republic had become more like the usual barroom ballgame: background noise. "We found that you really have to let people get the things off their chests," Seely said.

Burlington is the seat of Boone County, and the rally took place at the Boone County fairgrounds, on an afternoon that was chilly enough to inspire one of the speakers, the ghostwriter of Joe the Plumber's autobiography, to dismiss global warming, to great applause. A second-generation Chrysler dealer, whose lot had just been shut down, complained that the Harvard-educated experts on Wall Street and in Washington knew nothing about automobiles. ("I've been in this business since 1958, and what I know is that the American public does not want small cars!") The district's congressional representative, Geoff Davis, brought up the proposed cap-and-trade legislation favored by Democrats, and called it an "economic colonization of the hardworking states that produce the energy, the food, and the manufactured goods of the heartland, to take that and pay for social programs in the large coastal states."

Boone County borders both Indiana and Ohio, and was described to me by a couple of people I met there as "flyover country," with a mixture of provincial anxiety and defensive skepticism—as in "What brings you to flyover country?" The phrase is not quite apt. Home to the Cincinnati airport, which serves as a Delta hub, the county owes much of its growth and relative prosperity over the past two decades to large numbers of people flying in and out, not over. But Delta's recent struggles, and rumors about the impending contraction of its local subsidiary, Comair, have contributed to a deeper sense of economic anxiety. "You go to the warehouses around the airport, probably at least a third or twenty-five per cent are empty," Seely said. "We need to give somebody a break here, so people can start making money." As it happens, the largest employer in northern Kentucky today is the I.R.S.

Another Bulldog's regular, a middle-aged woman dressed in jeans, a turtleneck, and a red sweatshirt, stood beside some stables, hustling for signatures to add to the Tea Party mailing list. "I tell you, it's an enthusiastic group," she said. "Talk about grassroots. This is as grassroots as it gets."

"And she works full time," Seely added.

"Not as full time as I'd like."

About a thousand people had turned up at the rally, most of them old enough to remember a time when the threats to the nation's long-term security, at home and abroad, were more easily defined and acknowledged. Suspicious of decadent élites and concerned about a central government whose ambitions had grown unmanageably large, they sounded, at least in broad strokes, a little like the left-wing secessionists I'd met at a rally in Vermont in the waning days of the Bush Administration. Large assemblies of like-minded people, even profoundly anxious people anticipating the imminent death of empire, have an unmistakable allure: festive despair. A young man in a camouflage jacket sold T-shirts ("Fox News Fan," for example), while a local district judge doled out play money: trillion-dollar bills featuring the face of Ben Bernanke. An insurance salesman paraded around, dressed as though guiding a tour of Colonial Williamsburg. "Oh, this is George Washington!" Seely said. "Hey, George, come over here a minute."

"I'm back for the Second American Revolution," the man said. "My weapons this time will be the Constitution, the Internet, and my talk-radio ads."

If there was a central theme to the proceedings, it was probably best expressed in the refrain "Can you hear us now?," conveying a long-standing grievance that the political class in Washington is unresponsive to the needs and worries of ordinary Americans. Republicans and Democrats alike were targets of derision. "Their constituency is

George Soros,” one man grumbled, and I was reminded of the dangerous terrain where populism slides into a kind of nativist paranoia—the subject of Richard Hofstadter’s famous essay linking anti-Masonic sentiment in the eighteenth century with McCarthyism and with the John Birch Society founder Robert Welch’s contention that Dwight Eisenhower was “a dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy.” The name Soros, understood in the context of this recurring strain—the “paranoid style in American politics,” Hofstadter called it—is synonymous, like Rockefeller or Rothschild, with a New World Order.

The Soros grumbler, who had also labelled John McCain a Communist, was dressed in jeans pulled up well above his waist with suspenders, and wearing thick, oversized shades. When he saw my notebook, he turned to Seely and asked, “Where’s he from, supposedly?” Informed that I live in New York, he replied, “There’s a nightmare right there.” What he had in mind was not a concentration of godless liberals, as it turned out, but something more troubling. “Major earthquake faults,” he said. “It’s hard in spots, but basically it’s like a bag of bricks.” Some more discussion revolved around a super-volcano in Yellowstone (“It’ll fry Denver and Salt Lake at the same time”) and the dire geological forecasts of Edgar Cayce, the so-called Sleeping Prophet, which involved the sudden emergence of coastlines in what, for the time being, is known as the Midwest. I asked the man his name. “T. J. Randall,” he said. “That’s not my real name, but that’s the one I’m using.”

Seely saw our encounter with the doomsayer more charitably than Hofstadter might have. “That’s an example of an intelligent person who’s not quite got it all together,” he said. “You can tell that. But he’s pretty interesting to talk to.” Seely’s own reaction, upon learning where I’d come from, had been to ask if I was familiar with the New School, in Greenwich Village. His youngest daughter, Amber, had gone there.

I asked Seely what Amber thought of the Tea Party. “We kind of hit a happy medium where we don’t discuss certain things,” he said, and added that at the moment Amber, who now works for a nonprofit that builds affordable housing in New Orleans, was visiting his son, Denver, who is enrolled in a Ph.D. program in mechanical engineering at Mississippi State.

By most accounts, the Paul Revere figure of this Second American Revolution is an excitable cable-news reporter named Rick Santelli, a former futures trader and Drexel Burnham Lambert vice-president who stood on the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange last February and sounded the alarm on CNBC about the new Administration’s planned assistance for homeowners facing foreclosure. He proposed a nationwide referendum, via the Internet, on the matter of subsidizing “the losers’ mortgages,” winning both the attention and the vocal support of the working traders in his midst. “President Obama, are you listening?” he shouted, and then said that he’d been thinking of organizing a Chicago Tea Party in July, urging “all you capitalists” to come join him on Lake Michigan, where “we’re going to be dumping in some derivative securities.” It was a delicate pose—financial professionals more or less laughing at debtors while disavowing the lending techniques that had occasioned the crisis—but within a matter of hours a Web site, OfficialChicagoTeaParty.com, had gone live, and by the end of the following week dozens of small protests were occurring simultaneously around the country, invoking the legacy of early New England colonists in their revolt against King George.

Santelli’s rant was delivered at 7:10 A.M., Chicago time, but it was highly YouTube-able, and all the more effective to the alienated masses—“the rabble,” as some have taken to calling themselves—because Santelli was not a known conservative mouthpiece like Rush Limbaugh or Beck or Sean Hannity. The primal narrative of any insurrection benefits from the appearance of unlikely spontaneity. Another early agitator who merits a retrospective footnote is Keli Carender, a.k.a. the Liberty Belle, a blogger and “random woman,” as one admirer says, “from Seattle, of all places.” Carender was a week ahead of Santelli in voicing her dissent; her mistake was choosing the wrong animating metaphor. Borrowing terminology from Limbaugh, she organized a Porkulus Protest in response to the economic-stimulus bill, and tried tagging Democratic leaders with epithets like Porky and Piggy and Porker. (Not the least of tea’s advantages is the ease with which it can be converted into a handy acronym: Taxed Enough Already.) But Carender identified a tactic that would prove invaluable in the months of raucous town-hall meetings and demonstrations to follow: adopting the idealistic energy of liberal college students. “Unlike the melodramatic lefties, I do not want to get arrested,” she wrote. “I do, however, want to take a page from their playbook and be loud, obnoxious, and in their faces.”

Spring brought the founding of the Tea Party Patriots, a centralized Web destination for decentralized malcontents, and the start of Glenn Beck's side gig as a social organizer, through his 9.12 Project. The numbers nine and twelve referred to a checklist of principles and values, but their greater significance lay in the allusion to September 11th. "The day after America was attacked, we were not obsessed with Red States, Blue States or political parties," the project's mission statement read. "We want to get everyone thinking like it is September 12, 2001, again." The chosen values were inarguable: things like honesty and hope and courage. Only two of the principles ("I believe in God and He is the center of my life"; "I work hard for what I have and I will share it with who I want to. Government cannot force me to be charitable") indicated any kind of political agenda. Inclusiveness was the point.

As spring passed into summer, the scores at local Tea Party gatherings turned to hundreds, and then thousands, collecting along the way footloose Ron Paul supporters, goldbugs, evangelicals, Atlas Shruggers, militiamen, strict Constitutionals, swine-flu skeptics, scattered 9/11 "truthers," neo-"Birchers," and, of course, "birthers"—those who remained convinced that the President was a Muslim double agent born in Kenya. "We'll meet back here in six months," Beck had said in March, and when September 12th arrived even the truest of believers were surprised by the apparent strength of the new movement, as measured by the throngs who made the pilgrimage to the Capitol for a Taxpayer March on Washington, swarming the Mall with signs reading "'1984' Is Not an Instruction Manual" and "The Zoo Has an African Lion and the White House Has a Lyin' African!"

Politics is ultimately a numbers game, and the natural excitement surrounding 9.12 drove crowd estimates upward, from an early lowball figure of sixty thousand, reported by ABC News, into the hundreds of thousands and across the million mark, eventually nearing two million—an upper limit of some significance, because 1.8 million was the figure commonly reported in mainstream or "state-run" media outlets as the attendance at President Obama's Inauguration. "There are more of us than there are of them, and we know the truth," one of the Kentucky organizers, who had carpooled to D.C. with a couple of co-workers from an auto-parts warehouse, told me. The fact that the mainstream media generally declined to acknowledge the parallel, regarding the marchers as a loud and motley long tail of disaffection, and not a silent majority, only hardened their resolve.

Consider our peculiar political situation at the end of this first decade of the new century. An African-American Democrat is elected President, following the collapse of the two great symbols of postwar prosperity, Detroit and Wall Street. Seizing on the erosion of public trust in elite institutions, the C.E.O. of World Wrestling Entertainment, Linda McMahon, announces her candidacy for the U.S. Senate, touting her opposition to a federal banking bailout whose principal beneficiaries include many of her neighbors in Greenwich, Connecticut. Another pro-wrestling eminence, the former Minnesota governor Jesse (the Body) Ventura, begins hosting a new television show called "Conspiracy Theory," evincing a distrust in government so deep that it equates environmental crusaders with the Bilderbergs. A multimillionaire pornographer, Larry Flynt, is moved to branch out from his regular perch as an enemy of moral hypocrisy with an expanded sense of purpose, lamenting the takeover of Washington by "Wall Street, the mega-corporations and the super-rich," in an op-ed for the Huffington Post, and calling for an unspecified form of national strike inspired by Shays's Rebellion. And an obscure state senator who once posed naked for *Cosmopolitan* emerges, after driving a pickup truck around Massachusetts, as a leading contender to unseat the aforementioned President.

American history is dotted with moments like this, when, as the Princeton historian Sean Wilentz says, "panic and vitriol come to the fore," occasioning a temporary realignment of political interests. Flynt cited Franklin Roosevelt's use of the phrase "economic royalists," which was itself an echo of the moneyed interests targeted by Andrew Jackson, who earned the nickname King Mob after his Inauguration, in 1829, brought hordes of precursors of the *Hustler* subscribers and WrestleMania fans of our time to the White House lawn. Jackson's staunch opposition to the Second Bank of the United States set a precedent for generations of Wall Street resentment to come.

Between the demise of the Whig Party and the consolidation of the modern Republican Party, under Lincoln, there came a nativist movement of Know Nothings, as they called themselves—or "the Lou Dobbs party," as Michael Kazin, the author of "The Populist Persuasion," now says. Marx and Engels had just published their

manifesto, and German immigrants were suspected of importing Socialist ideas. The new waves of Irish Catholics couldn't be trusted, either: who was to say they wouldn't take their orders from the Pope instead of the President?

Gilded Age excesses gave rise to a new People's Party, a movement of Southern and Western farmers and miners united in opposition to railroad speculators, and the panic of 1893 accelerated their cause. By 1896, William Jennings Bryan was addressing the Democratic Convention with his famous critique of "the idle holders of idle capital." (The convention, held in Chicago, loosed "a wild, raging, irresistible mob which nothing can turn from its abominable foolishness," as the *Times* put it.) "That basic kind of vocabulary, against the monarchy and the aristocracy, has informed every conceivable American dissident group in one way or another," Wilentz says. "Lyndon LaRouche does that whole Queen of England thing. He's *still* fighting the American Revolution."

The Tea Party movement, identified by some commentators as the first right-wing street-protest movement of our time, may be a reflection of how far populist sentiment has drifted away from the political left in the decades since the New Deal. "The original Populists were the ones who came up with the income tax," Charles Postel, the author of "The Populist Vision," said recently. "They were for the nationalization of everything. Their idea of a model institution was the Post Office." Bryan believed that the "right to coin money and issue money is a function of the government," and railed, most memorably, against the "cross of gold." Yet few ideas stir the Tea Party faithful more than a fear of creeping nationalization and the dangers—both moral and practical—associated with printing money to suit momentary needs. The sponsors of Glenn Beck's nightly history lessons on the depredations of American progressivism frequently include purveyors of gold.

One historical comparison that some Tea Party champions have made is to the civil-rights movement, and, to the extent that the analogy holds, it may reflect the fact that the Tea Party seems to derive much of its energy from the members of that generation who did not participate in the cultural revolution of the sixties, and are only belatedly coming to terms with social and demographic trends set in motion fifty years ago. Don Seely invited me to his house for coffee the day after the rally at the Kentucky fairgrounds, and showed me his Air Force Commendation Medal, awarded for meritorious service from 1967 to 1971. "At this age, I was so ignorant," he said. "Every once in a while, you'd catch a glimpse on TV of Martin Luther King—all that kind of stuff was going on. I graduated college in December of '66. About a year after I left, that's when all the riots happened. I'm thinking, *What is going on?*" Seely had always wanted to be a pilot, but, because of poor eyesight, he ended up an engineer in a satellite-control facility. The medal was accompanied by a photograph of Seely in his captain's uniform, and he said that Amber, after looking at the image, had proclaimed that he was the only person she knew who'd kept the same hair style for nearly fifty years: short, straight, and parted neatly on the far right.

Seely grew up across the street from a dairy farm that his father owned, in Ohio, and he considers himself a "green," by the mid-century standards relating to productive use of the land, in contrast with the "weirdos" whom he now associates with environmental causes. "If they had their way, all the buildings, all industry, all fossil fuel would stop," he said. "And you can't have that." He and his wife, who works at the Creation Museum, an institution dedicated to promoting a Biblically literal account of the earth's origins, raised their family in a Columbus suburb and moved south across the Ohio River about a year ago, to be closer to their grandchildren. Their new Kentucky home has a large expanse of freshly mowed grass out back that Seely's brother-in-law at first mistook for a golf course. "Those towers over there, that's actually Ohio," Seely said, stepping onto his back porch and pointing at the nearest tall buildings. "Ohio has a problem: money is leaving, educated people are leaving. 'Cause we have a lot of good universities in Ohio, but there's no jobs there, so you educate your kids and then you send them off."

Seely had a history in local politics to reflect on as he thought about how to reverse the tide of urban progressivism. Many of his cohorts did not, however, and he worried about the transition from the strange euphoria of collective exasperation. Like the sixties radicals, they risked suffering from a kind of idealistic naïveté. "I don't think the Tea Party quite understands how the system actually works," he said. For about a decade, he served as a Republican central committeeman, a volunteer position, in Ohio's Franklin County, where the general level of civic engagement was such that politicians were known to be willing to appear at any home where five or six neighbors might assemble. Democracy as he experienced it was practiced in a largely backroom fashion, with the committeemen and the county chairs trading favors for endorsements. The local Republican Party, in his telling, consisted of three competing factions: moderates, fiscal conservatives, and Seely's group, the social conservatives.

A few years ago, when the longtime Franklin County chair, a friend of Seely's, stepped down, the first two groups banded together to block the social conservatives from retaining power. "And guess who they elected to be the chairman?" he asked me. "An open homosexual!"

"People are finally getting to the point where they want to educate themselves," Seely went on. "We've got to get to the point where people are educated enough to find out about 'Well, how *do* you endorse candidates?' That's really where the power is. It's been very frustrating to me, because I tell people about my experience and it goes *ppfff* *ppfff*"—he gestured to indicate something passing over his head. "They say, 'You know, we're not interested in local things. We're interested in national things.' I go, 'Well, fine. That's good. But, really, you got to be local.' "

After we finished our coffee, Seely took me to the Creation Museum, a mile down the road. The museum, which opened in 2007, at a cost of twenty-seven million dollars, features a planetarium, animatronic dinosaurs, and a partial replica, built to exacting scale, of Noah's Ark. Several staff Ph.D.s work on site. The first exhibit showed two paleontologists, a Darwinist and a Biblical literalist, examining a fossil. "Depending on what your world view is, and what you believe and what you've been taught, you can look at the same thing and come to a different conclusion," Seely explained. The exhibit, called "Starting Points," was intended to demonstrate the plausible divergence in theories about man's relation to dinosaurs, but it could just as easily have spoken for the assumptions we make about Barack Obama's past associations with figures like Bill Ayers and Bernardine Dohrn.

Obama's selection last summer of the Republican congressman John McHugh to be his Secretary of the Army created the need for a special election, and provided the first opportunity for Tea Party activists to make an electoral impact both locally and nationally. It served as a dress rehearsal for the Massachusetts Senate race, and enabled activists to learn from their mistakes. McHugh's district, New York's Twenty-third, covers most of what locals call the North Country, from the Adirondacks to the St. Lawrence River and extending west to Lake Ontario. Primarily rural, its politics and class markers have more in common with Kentucky than with Manhattan, and the Republican Party had been in control since before the turn of the twentieth century. But Obama carried the district, with fifty-two per cent of the vote, and the eleven Republican county chairs made what seemed like an expedient choice in nominating the veteran state assemblywoman Dede Scozzafava to run for McHugh's seat. Scozzafava was a big-tent selection: pro-choice, in favor of gay marriage, and a friend of the teachers' union.

Tea Party adherents responded by backing a third-party challenge from an earnest accountant named Doug Hoffman, who had served as the C.F.O. for the Lake Placid Olympics in 1980. "We formed the foundation that created the Miracle, and I think the miracle was the start of the Reagan Revolution, and it eventually brought down the Soviet Union," Hoffman told a group of supporters. "Since this is the first congressional race of 2010, we're going to break down the wall again. And the miracle is we're going to take America back, and we're going to get our freedom back."

Shortly before the election, I went to Cicero, New York, to hear the former House majority leader Dick Armey address what one listener referred to as a "glorified sticker club." A group of about thirty people had assembled in the cavernous interior of Drivers Village, a cluster of adjoined auto dealerships. They had been meeting regularly for months to talk politics. "This could be the single most important election that any of us will ever get to work on in our lifetime—the game-changer," Armey, who now heads a supply-side nonprofit called FreedomWorks, declared. He predicted—correctly—that Scozzafava would end up conceding before Election Day, and said that the only remaining question was whether Hoffman, who was polling in third place, could manage to overcome the Democrats' likely election fraud, which he estimated to be worth three percentage points. "In '93, when the worm started to turn, it started to turn with a special election in Kentucky," he said, referring to a 1994 contest that was prompted by the death of an incumbent Democrat, and won by a little-known Republican, a Christian-bookstore owner named Ron Lewis. "That election changed everybody's mood," Armey said. It also paved the way for the Republican takeover of the House in the '94 midterms.

"None of us knew this was going to hit," a young woman named Jennifer Bernstone said, looking up from a laptop. "We all went to D.C. in September: '*Woo hoo*, that was awesome!' We all came home. '*Now what?*' This is the what. Who the heck knew? I sing for a living. I'm an actress. I don't *do* this stuff." Her immediate concern was the effective deployment of Hoffman supporters from Connecticut and Westchester, with whom she'd been e-mailing. They were coming to canvass for the weekend, and needed places to crash.

“I feel a kinship with the Afghan hill men,” a young man with wavy hair and glasses said, eyeing Armeý’s young associates with an air of caution. “We’re a bunch of ordinary people, and a bunch of very powerful groups are coming in with very different philosophies—maybe sometimes I agree with them, most of the time I don’t—and they’re having a proxy war in our back yard.”

The group at Drivers Village had organized through Meetup.com under the name Central New York 9.12, and, according to one of them, a Constitutionalist, they represented about eight political subgroups, including that most prized Tea Party scalp: Obama voters. They had brought no props, and none were dressed in period garb. They seemed united principally by their acute sensitivity to the raging-teabagger stereotype, and, as if to reassure each other, compared notes of their experiences on the Mall:

“You saw the lack of litter.”

“I think it had more to do with the calibre of the people involved.”

“As you can see, we’re not really what a lot of people portray us as,” William Wells, the Afghanistan analogist, told me, after apologizing for the mud stains on his jeans, which he attributed to harvesting pinot gris earlier in the day. Wells’s father is an astronomer turned vintner, and his mother is a doctor. “I used to work at Fannie Mae,” he said. “I was a research analyst in the loss-forecasting division. If you understand that, you understand kind of why I’m here. In some ways, this, for me, is paying off my debt when I should have said something.” He added that Sean Hannity and Keith Olbermann had each got the story of the housing crisis about half right, despite “very different angles of approach,” and that Glenn Beck, “whatever you think of his histrionics,” had been closer to ninety per cent correct.

As the meeting was breaking up, a soft-spoken project manager, and father of six, named Paul Dopp asked me if I knew who had won the Battle of Saratoga. “It was General Arnold,” he said—Benedict Arnold. “Part of the reason he turned traitor was that he didn’t get the recognition for it. He got ticked. But what he did is he rode right out in front between the soldiers, looked at the Americans, and said, ‘I’m fighting. Are you coming?’ And they came. Someone is going to stand up for principle.” Dopp said that his brother had travelled to the Soviet Union in the nineteen-eighties, while studying détente, and returned with a sober lesson on the corrupting effects of power. “For a lot of people, government is their religion,” he said. “That’s their place of worship, because they truly believe in the betterment of man.”

At night, with the dealerships closed, Drivers Village felt vast and lonely. “This used to be a mall before the economy crashed around here,” Dopp said, referring not to the recent tumult but to the Rockefeller era. “We’ve been ravaged so well, so long, we’re kind of like, ‘The last person that leaves Schenectady, please turn the lights off.’ The only reason we’re still alive is because of the bubble created by the financial system down in the city.” The mall had been resuscitated by a born-again car salesman whose political sympathies inclined him to let the Commons, as the interior corridors of Drivers Village are known, be put to revolutionary use.

Without paying attention, I followed the group out a different exit from the way I’d come in, and quickly realized that it would take a long time to find my car—parked amid acres of cars awaiting sale in a recession. One of the men at the meeting offered to drive me around the lot to speed up the search, taking the opportunity to show me a three-ring binder that he kept in the back seat of his van, full of homemade graphs showing the growth of the national debt, and Internet printouts that hinted at links between, for instance, ACORN and an Obama campaign office in Louisiana. “That’s what got us mad, those sorts of things,” he said. “You know, it drives us nuts. I would love for someone to actually come out and say this—someone that is credible, other than myself, in my own mind.”

The involvement of people like Dick Armeý in the Tea Party movement led many Democrats, including Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, to dismiss the significance of the activism as a creation of right-wing moguls. FreedomWorks and a host of lobbying firms and think tanks, including Americans for Tax Reform, the Club for Growth, Campaign for Liberty, and the Ayn Rand Center for Individual Rights, sponsored the march in Washington last September. Lobbyists and think tanks in turn rely on financial support from corporate interests with enormous stakes in much of the prospective legislation on Capitol Hill. “Astroturfing” is the critics’ preferred term for this phenomenon, with its imputation of a synthetic, top-down structure to contrast with the outward appearance of grassroots independence. Yet the presence of paid FreedomWorks operatives at meetings like the one in Cicero, handing out Obamacare Translator leaflets and legislator “leave-behinds,” would be cause for greater skepticism if

the civilians in attendance weren't already compiling binders of their own and reciting from memory the troublesome implications buried on page 59 of House Resolution 3200. The blogosphere can make trained foot soldiers of us all, with or without corporate funding.

"If you listen to the Democrats, they're completely convinced somebody's in charge of all this," Dick Arme y said, sitting at a hotel café in Syracuse with a press aide, the day after his pep talk to the sticker club. He took off his Stetson and said that he'd only just learned about the existence of the Tea Party Patriots and "a group that call themselves the 9.12 Project, and I'm not quite sure where they come from."

"It's Glenn Beck," his press aide interjected.

"I don't know Glenn Beck," Arme y said. "I think I was on his show one time. Was I?"

FreedomWorks has an annual budget of only seven million dollars and a paid staff of eighteen, most of whom travel comfortably within the Washington establishment, where debating the sanity of Beck remains a common cocktail-party gambit. Its employees are well versed in the differences between the Austrian and Chicago economic schools, and in the biographical details of Howard Roark and John Galt, but tend to cringe at some of the paranoid elements within the Ron Paul contingent. They provide logistical support and tactical know-how, like the dreaded community organizers mocked by Rudy Giuliani, to a network of some four hundred activists scattered around the country. In their advisory capacity, their aims are to push fiscal concerns, not social issues, and to deemphasize personal attacks on Obama, which could be perceived as having racial overtones; instead, they take on Pelosi and Harry Reid.

"Where did MoveOn.org come from?" Arme y asked, citing the grassroots liberal group that was until recently the envy of all its conservative counterparts, and then answered his own question, incorrectly: "From George Bush." In fact, as Arme y's aide was quick to point out, MoveOn originated in the Clinton impeachment proceedings, and subsequently gained wider attention under Bush, and specifically through its unofficial association with the grassroots campaign of Howard Dean—or "the governor from back East that ran for President," as Arme y put it, adding, "His name will come to me tomorrow."

An absent-minded professor in cowboy boots, Arme y saw his role as eliciting coverage of the growing conservative opposition from news organizations (like this one) that exist outside the Fox and Friends echo chamber. "I don't know if you noticed, but in August, all of a sudden, I became the bogeyman," he told me, with undisguised pleasure, and said that he'd received an e-mail from an old friend, "a liberal English prof from a small college down the road," in Dallas, that read "Shame on you." The outburst had been prompted by a blog post linking FreedomWorks to a town-hall strategy memo distributed by activists in Fairfield County, Connecticut. (The memo, which was written by a Tea Party Patriots volunteer, included such suggestions as "Watch for an opportunity to yell out and challenge the Rep's statements early" and "The goal is to rattle him.") In his defense, Arme y offered the folksy alibi of having been "back in Texas, tending to two sick goats," on the weekend of the town-hall event in question, with the veterinary receipts to prove it. "They made a walking, talking, attention-getting device out of me," he said.

Even as Arme y welcomes the attention, he must be wary of attracting too much. The Tea Party Express, a road show funded by a PAC called Our Country Deserves Better, has earned the scorn of many activists for being too slickly produced—its buses too flashy, its steak-house tabs too high. Some even call it the Astroturf Express, in an attempt to own the opposition's slur. "That's a Republican PAC," one board member of the defiantly nonpartisan Tea Party Patriots declared recently, and, to be sure, Arme y's aide recommended "a great YouTube" in which the Republican Senator John Cornyn can be seen being booed and heckled on a stage in Austin for his support of the Troubled Asset Relief Program. TARP, because it happened on President Bush's watch, makes for a better Tea Party litmus test than anything since.

"There you are, Leader," the aide said at another point, drawing Arme y's attention to a television above the hotel bar, which was showing the local news. Arme y was standing behind a lectern, touting the virtues of a flat tax, while Doug Hoffman stood off to the side, smiling. The footage was from a boisterous rally in downtown Syracuse, which is not part of District Twenty-three.

Most liberals mistook Hoffman's eventual defeat, which came after a bitter Scozzafava endorsed the Democrat Bill Owens, as a sign that the movement had overshot. "If the tea party right can't win there, imagine how it

might fare in the nation where most Americans live,” Frank Rich wrote in the *Times*, noting that New York’s Twenty-third District is ninety-three per cent white. The headline over Rich’s column was “THE NIGHT THEY DROVE THE TEA PARTIERS DOWN.” Rich and others, including senior members of the Obama Administration, underestimated the strength of the movement, and the extent of the resentment that fed it. By fixating on the most egregious protest signs, and making sport of Tea Party infighting, they ignored the movement’s gradual consolidation.

Meanwhile, FreedomWorks and other activist groups refocussed their attention on Florida, where a thirty-eight-year-old fiscal conservative named Marco Rubio was mounting a strong primary challenge for the Senate against the popular but moderate governor, Charlie Crist. Rand Paul, son of Ron, caught up with Kentucky’s Secretary of State, Trey Grayson, in the race to succeed Senator Jim Bunning. And in Tennessee’s Eighth Congressional District, earlier this month, a conservative named Donn Janes opted out of the Republican primary in order to run as “an independent Tea Party candidate.” Bill O’Reilly, who has never seemed entirely comfortable with the anarchic impulses of the activist fringe, told his new Fox News colleague Sarah Palin that he wouldn’t be surprised to see her lead a Tea Party ticket in 2012. “Well, there is no Tea Party ticket,” Palin demurred. “There could be,” he said. If a registered national Tea Party existed, a recent Rasmussen poll suggested, its popularity would exceed that of the Republicans. Among independent voters, a hypothetical Tea Party candidate beat a Democrat, too.

The lesson that the Republican establishment drew from upstate New York was not to shun the movement, for fear of losing moderates, but to court it (the embattled Republican National Committee chairman Michael Steele recently used teacups as props during a speech) or get out of its way, as evidenced by last week’s special election in Massachusetts. While Scott Brown, a telegenic state senator, visited the kinds of coastal New England towns that had always counted Ted Kennedy as their own, the National Republican Senatorial Committee deliberately chose not to offer him much public support, because of voters’ dissatisfaction with party politics.

As in upstate New York, volunteers from elsewhere flocked to canvass and man phone banks: not crazed sign-carriers but quietly dedicated engineers and winemakers and singers. By the end, Brown was raising a million dollars a day from donors who saw an opportunity to make the election a referendum on health care.

The Democrats were “caught napping,” as David Axelrod admitted to the *Times*. Massachusetts already has a more generous health-care system than anything that either the Senate or the House has yet proposed. Attorney General Martha Coakley, the Democratic candidate, appeared at times barely to campaign at all, and flubbed the kinds of exchanges—about the Red Sox, say—designed to showcase blue-collar cred. While Coakley carried the city of Boston, the site of the original Tea Party, with nearly seventy per cent of the vote, Brown, notably, won the neighborhood of South Boston, where the sting of forced busing still lingers from the seventies.

The lesson that the Tea Party movement seems to have learned is, in effect, Don Seely’s: to respect local preferences and work selectively within the system. Rather than back a libertarian third-party candidate, the activists this time rallied behind the equivalent of Dede Scozzafava. Scott Brown at one point likened himself to a “Reagan Democrat” and is something of a moderate on abortion rights. One of Dick Armey’s associates told me in November, “We have got to show that this movement can be successful outside the South.” Now they have, and New York’s Senator Chuck Schumer, who made the mistake of describing Brown as a “far-right teabagger,” in a last-ditch fund-raising appeal on behalf of Coakley, has invited talk of a movement to depose him in November by drafting Rick Santelli’s CNBC colleague Larry Kudlow.

What remains to be seen is whether the anti-establishment bent of the Tea Partiers will drive them to disown their greatest coup in the weeks to come. Less than twenty-four hours after the victory, Glenn Beck was suggesting that Brown might be morally unfit for office. (“This one could end with a dead intern. I’m just saying.”)

Back in New York City, you can feel the tremors in the social bedrock, if not in the earth’s crust, as T. J. Randall would have it. An online video game, designed recently by libertarians in Brooklyn, called “2011: Obama’s Coup Fails” imagines a scenario in which the Democrats lose seventeen of nineteen seats in the Senate and a hundred and seventy-eight in the House during the midterm elections, prompting the President to dissolve the Constitution and implement an emergency North American People’s Union, with help from Mexico’s Felipe Calderón, Canada’s Stephen Harper, and various civilian defense troops with names like the Black Tigers, the International Service Union Empire, and CORNY, or the Congress of Rejected and Neglected Youth. Lou Dobbs has gone missing, Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh turn up dead at a FEMA concentration camp, and you, a lone

militiaman in a police state where private gun ownership has been outlawed, are charged with defeating the enemies of patriotism, one county at a time.

Not long ago, at a restaurant in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge, I stood next to Kellen Giuda, a twenty-seven-year-old self-described “party guy” (in the night-life sense) and the proprietor of a Web site, parcbench.com, that he describes as a “*Rolling Stone* from the right.” He was listening to a couple of deficit hawks from Hoboken who were worried about potential demagogic influences on the Tea Party movement from the likes of Sarah Palin. Giuda is a co-founder of Tea Party 365, a local New York City battalion, which had convened this particular meeting, as well as a national board member for the Tea Party Patriots. While the Hoboken pair were making their case, he glanced at his iPhone and skimmed a newly arriving e-mail from yet another upstart organization, Tea Party Nation. It announced a national convention to be held in Nashville on the first weekend in February, with Sarah Palin as the keynote speaker.

Dick Arme, despite his contention that “the Republican Party is undergoing the most massive identity crisis in the history of politics,” was nearby, talking happily with Ed Cox, the newly elected chair of the New York Republican State Committee, who seemed to recognize that a shift in the power center had occurred.

Eventually, a couple of men dressed in black silenced the crowd with an impassioned presentation that called to mind lefty gatherings of the sixties, or even the thirties. One of them was from Maine, the other from Fresno, and they were driving across the country to raise awareness of the plight of farmers in California’s Central Valley, where a water shortage had been creating a “new dust bowl” and threatening the local way of life. Women handed out flyers for a campaign called Saving the Valley that Hope Forgot. (“Americans need to ask themselves whether they are willing to settle for foreign food, like they have settled for foreign oil.”) A gray-haired man in a blue velvet jacket and sneakers started inching toward the center of the room with an acoustic guitar. He had a “Reagan for President” button on his shoulder strap and a “Hoffman for Congress” sticker on his case.

The cause of the water shortage was not a natural drought, the men in black explained, but “radical environmentalism”: a government effort to protect an endangered “two-inch bait fish” called the Delta smelt. (They had recently barbecued a smelt and found it wanting.) And they had opted for a four-wheel-drive S.U.V. instead of a beat-up van for their road trip. But they invited the guitarist to play, and before long Hank from Gravesend and Julie from Chelsea and Kellen from Morningside Heights were singing along to the chorus of a folk anthem in that great American tradition:

Take it back,
 Take our country back.
 Our way of life is now under attack.
 Draw a line in the sand, so they all understand
 And our values stay intact.
 Take it back. ♦

ILLUSTRATION: EDWARD SOREL

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