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# Engaging America: Unearthing the middle way in the conflict between liberals and conservatives

Noah Cadet

*SIT Graduate Institute*, [noah.j.cadet@gmail.com](mailto:noah.j.cadet@gmail.com)

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# School for International Training

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*Engaging America: Unearthing the middle way in the conflict between liberals and conservatives*

Noah Jean-Marie Cadet

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Independent Practitioner Inquiry Capstone Advised by Dr. Mokhtar Bouba

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Student: Noah J. Cadet

Date: May 1, 2018

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## Abstract

Liberals and conservatives have waged conflict over development strategies since the founding of the United States of America. Observers of the 2016 Presidential Election may have noticed an escalation of a preexisting trend of destructive engagement between Democrats and Republicans. The researcher pursued primary and secondary research in an attempt to understand how conflict within and between development paradigms in the United States can be transcended. The central research question was regarding how this conflict affects efforts towards peacebuilding at the grassroots from the perspective of a liberal. The

literature review provides a brief histories of US American Political Economy and Political Economy as an academic discipline with a focus on Friedrich Hayek and John Maynard Keynes. The secondary research was done in conjunction with an online survey of seventy-eight individuals, collecting demographic information as well as participants' views on political conflict in economic policy. A discussion emerges, blending the findings of the two inquiries into several main trends preventing transcendence of conflict within US American development paradigms. The willingness to make leaps of faith for a Political Economic ideology and disempowered moderate, in relation to liberals and conservative voices, were noted within both primary and secondary research. Future research is suggested in the role of faith in ideology and a disempowered moderate in prevention of peacebuilding.

## Introduction

The deepest curiosity and broadest question of this research is how does a community create and maintain inclusive institutions. This curiosity forced me to question if modern economics, as a sub-institution cut out of political economy, can continue to survive as an objective, mathematical science considering how values- and interests-driven its roots are. I argue that economics, as a positive science, cannot engage the hearts and souls of communities due to how it is structured as an institution. Its insistence on providing technical solutions “turns off” people and, in some ways, encourages them revere it as a Truth. The movement from one of many truths to this elevated status allows it to inform how communities should be run, rather than helping elements run their communities.

This research is an attempt to understand how economics can revert back to its roots through better engagement between liberals and conservatives. If liberals and conservatives can rediscover common ground, they may not need to opt-out of development discussions through crafting a positive science. If Political Economy becomes a platform for unearthing the values and interests that undergird the desired development of conflict parties, the discipline may be more useful as a normative pursuit that strikes a balance between art and science.

This exploration is critical in nature and I will be valuing humility, honesty and harmony. These values manifest in the way the intellectual history of Political Economy and liberal narratives of conservative political movements within the US American context are combined with a survey of citizens. The purpose of merging these viewpoints is to gain insights into how potential for dialogue towards positive

peace is diminished not only by the inertia of ideology, but the way in which our political economic systems encourage discourse between liberals and conservatives.

To enjoy the benefits of a more inclusive, resilient dialogue between liberals and conservatives within US American Political Economy, the nation must begin to value the complexity of practice over simplified, neat theory. The substitution of economics must leave the comfortable realm of technical assistance and join forces with other subfields within political economy to support efforts to increase the United States' adaptive capacity. This research keeps several questions at the heart of what it aims to unearth:

- Instead of producing an anti-thesis to the neoliberal order, how can liberals promote a more inclusive economics in which conflict is a force for ideological innovation?
- How can Political Economy, in this reimagined state, maintain a deepened, integrative pursuit of knowledge?
- How can this institution facilitate constructive, creative co-existence of clashing truths?

## Research Background

This capstone will explore how the ideological context of modern US American Political Economy has evolved by engaging both its intellectual origins and how individuals speak about it today. Throughout history, dominant political economic brands have hesitated to wage conflict constructively against alternatives. Classical economics pushed back against Keynesian economics in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century just as the latter resisted the rise of neoclassical economics in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today, another shift is occurring, making this research timely. Economists like Kate Raworth argue the focus on economic results (i.e., profit through efficiency gains) instead of embedded processes (i.e., how should resources be allocated to promote context-specific, sustainable development), has both advocated for unsustainable practices while preventing the emergence of social justice (Raworth, 2017). More moderate economists like Joseph Stiglitz, Daron Acemoglu and Paul Krugman have made a career out of pointing out deep flaws within neoclassical theory.

Even with these examples of deeper engagement with the assumptions of classical and neoclassical theory, without liberals being aware of how neoclassical economists and conservatives view the current period could result in the perpetuation of conflict instead of a better academic discipline and practice. As liberals see it, New Deal policies in the early 1900s, and the ensuing rise of labor unions, resulted in the corporate interests feeling under siege. This prompted the mobilization of the political resources within the business community. They began to develop their thinking and reach out to libertarian and social conservatives political identity groups. This political bloc built shared economic beliefs upon common ground for several decades, resulting in the current political force that is the reason for the gridlock in Congress and, more generally, poor state and federal policy. Some liberals challenge their comrades' narrative of conservatives today. Damien Cahill and Martijn Konings (2017) and others claim liberalism is more resilient than it is perceived to be both politically and economically. Its influence in the US American Constitution and the New Deal cemented it as the anchor around which political discourse roams. Economic liberalism illustrates its resilience shortly after each financial crash through "light touch", as opposed to deep and broad, regulation. Cahill and Konings (2017) posit that progressive academics such as Karl Polanyi and Naomi Klein are the misdiagnosing, and thereby reacting improperly, to the current conservative movement and how neoliberalism emerged (Cahill and Konings, 2017)

This research attempts to engage with the past and present of economic liberalism to gain insights into how it can facilitate a more peaceful future. As economics must engage in values clarification in order to co-construct alternative economic institutions that can promote coexistence between ideologies. Without these new institutions, destructive ideological conflict could continue to push divergent economists out of the field. I am wondering how economics, as an institution of political economy, could be re-made to be more life-giving to allow alternative ideologies to coexist with dominant ones.

## Research Questions

### *Central Questions*

- How does the conflict between US American liberals and conservatives, as seen from the liberal viewpoint, impact the art form of peacebuilding at the grassroots level?

### *Secondary Questions*

The following questions are intended to explore US American liberal narratives of the US American conservative community:

- 1) According to liberals, what defines the conservative community and values and interests it advances?
- 2) What does Liberalism mean today and what conditions legitimize and maintain the assumptions and expectations of the liberal community?
- 3) What is a functional definition neoliberalism, the dominant ideology in US American Political Economy? How does it push back against a more inclusive political economy?

## **Definitions of Key Terms**

Community – a collection of elements: subpersonalities merge into the individual, people are “nested” alongside each other within groups, groups are “nested” within larger societies, societies within nations, nations within the international community and, finally, into a single global entity alongside other subdivisions of life.

Development – nurturing the genuine vibrancy and deeper sense of resilience within and among elements. This requires a constant state of (re)contextualization of values and (re)evaluation of interests in order to ensure that a community’s political economy is both sustainable and authentic.

Political Economy – the practical art and theoretical science of maintaining a community through the allocation of its resources to practice its values through how it pursues its interests.

Economics – the science of allocating resources efficiently to effectively optimize a community’s way of meeting its elements’ needs and, if possible, desires.

Faith – a demonstrated capacity by which elements are willing to make leaps over inconvenient truths in order to preserve their narratives and models of how the world works. These truths are ones that

other elements are willing to maintain and have the potential to instigate the (re)contextualization of values and (re)evaluation of interests required for development to occur.

Sin – The Latin roots of this word mean “to miss the mark”; a way of being (thinking, feeling or acting) that is maligned with the context in which the element lives.

Liberal – an individual that supports the tenants of Liberalism; a general belief in that the values of freedom, equality and pursuit of knowledge will improve society.

Conservative – an individual that critiques the tenants of Liberalism due to the way it can undermine tradition and order.

## Literature Review

Edward Bernays, father of public relations, wrote that “we are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of... It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind” (Bernays, 1928). Therefore, even when neoliberal political economy proves to not be capable of providing the basic human needs for the majority of the United States, it retains its influence over the US American community. This literature review engages with the normative roots of the sub-institution of economics and how it became the positive science it is marketed as today. This is an attempt to understand how the US American collective conscious is molded by the “men we have never heard of”.

Economics, as it is broadly understood today, began in Ancient Greece. Xenophon put *oikos* (meaning “household”) and *nomos* (“rules” or “norms”) together to form this field of study. Though it was initially focused on the art management of the household, he would later expand to comment on the affairs of his city-state, Athens (Raworth, 2017). Later, Aristotle would distinguish between *economics*, as Xenophon defined it, and *chremastistics*, or the art of acquiring wealth. This focus on art began to erode when economics reemerged during the Enlightenment period in Europe.

The Physiocrats were a group of French thinkers that brought economics back into the minds of scholars. Taking an empirical and philosophical approach, they promoted land and labor as the ultimate



sources of wealth. Labor and commerce should be free to exist within the bounds of economic theory and moral law. Laws of society were supposed to be as close as possible to the sense of justice derived from nature, not to ensure the success of particular economic sectors. Mercantilism and industrialism, which emphasized foreign trade and manufacturing and put gold coin and bullion at the center of the economy, required institutions that hampered Physiocrats' vision of an agrarian society (Britannica, 2017).

English and Scottish thinkers responded to the ideas posed by the Physiocrats, again relying upon empirical and philosophical arguments. James Steuart, a Scottish lawyer, introduced the concept of political economy, blending the fields of political science and economics in the pursuit and maintenance of relationships and resource allocations such that society could meet its needs (Steuart, 1767). Adam Smith would not stray far, writing that political economy was a science intent on ensuring citizens' had "plentiful revenue" and the state had "revenue sufficient for the public services". The contribution of Smith was movement from the agriculture to industry through his analogy of the pin factory (Smith, 1776). Though John Stuart Mill's works are often seen as social and moral in nature, just like Smith, he articulated a view of political economy. Mill argued the field to be a science that observes "laws" of combined processes for the "production of wealth" (Mill, 1884). Though David Ricardo relied upon Smith for his understanding of political economy, his work on taxation and trade are still referenced today (Library of Economics and Liberty, 2008). Thomas Malthus, most known for his view that economic incentives impacted birth rates (Landsburg, 2008).

Though David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill are referenced today, it was Adam Smith who would become the "father" of economics. Smith's two most recognizable works, *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, work together to craft a definition of well-being and mold a society around it. Smith states that "...the chief part of human happiness arises from the consciousness of being beloved" (Smith, 2006). However, this is the worthiness of being loved and not simply being loved alone: one must deserve the love they get (Smith, 2006). This is from the individual being so content with their being that and surroundings that they are "at rest in the sense of lacking significant discord; it is peaceful, at a deep level. Second, happiness is more like coming to a stop than like a

process of moving toward a goal” (Griswold, 1999). He also states that the pursuit of self-interest must follow the “established decorums and ceremonials of society” (Smith, 2006). In *Wealth of Nations*, which is considered the original economics text, he argues a conflicting point. The “invisible hand” of the market was the supreme way of increasing and maintaining a nation’s wealth and this was manifest at the firm level by allowing them to act in accordance with their “self-enlightened interest” (Campbell and Skinner, 1982).

Though the physiocrats may have given birth to the engagement with economics, Smith and his peers would form the foundation of what would become known as classical economics. These individuals did not rely on empiricism as economists do today due to the lack of data and statistical tools. Instead, they were moral philosophers (Smith), political theorists (Mill) or people with the time to invest in reflecting upon the state of their nation. This strain of theory still has a strong hold on how economics is seen today, but its command of Western mainstream political economies only lasted until the Great Depression.

I argue that the failure of classical economics was its preservative nature. Instead of continuously seeking to adequately model the context so states could adapt, they made a Truth upon which to defend their assumptions. Rapid urbanization combined with mechanized farming had radically changed the context and how the masses interacted within and with it. The rise of socialism in Europe and, later, in the United States, was already challenging Western mainstream political economies before the financial crash of 1929. Their suggestions of letting the market correct itself after such a catastrophic economic event was not politically viable. Their inability to envision the potential of this financial crash discredited their economic model, allowing space for an alternative political economic model to become mainstream. Since classical economics was favored by political conservatives, their political capital dropped, leaving a vacuum for more liberal groups to enter.

John Maynard Keynes, a financial investor and economic advisor for England, made strong statements against classical economics. He believed that classical economics “represents the way in which we should like our Economy to behave. But to assume that it actually does so is to assume our difficulties away.” He diverged from other classical economics by arguing that a truly free market created the brutish conditions within which fascism and communism could emerge (Keynes, 1961). Keynes saw classical

economists akin to those who followed the belief that “all the evils of this actual world are logically necessary for the greater good of the best of all possible worlds” (Antognazza, 2009). Instead of living well during booms and suffering during a contracting economy, he advocated for a facilitated homeostasis in the economy. Keynes advanced what would become known as “countercyclical economic policy”; intervention during downturns and saving during booms (Wapshot, 2011). When the Great Depression hit, desperation may have encouraged people to seek an intervention and states began to supply it. Regardless, it crafted a new mainstream, giving liberals the high ground.

Keynes’ contributions to economic theory provided an economic framework within which the socialist-leaning working class could obtain their political economic goals. The Democratic coalition under Franklin D. Roosevelt was able to pass the New Deal programs through Congress as Keynes’ arguments won over moderate Republicans. Laws not only protected workers, but crafted social programs to provide economic help to millions of US Americans (Phillips-Fein, 2009). This would only continue for veterans of World War II in the form of the GI Bill and under the leadership of a moderate Republican. President Eisenhower who believed that attempts to “abolish social security, unemployment insurance, and eliminate labor laws and farm programs” was politically impossible even if “[t]here is a tiny splinter group, of course, that believes you can do these things... Their number is negligible and they are stupid.” (Hacker and Pierson, 2010, 189)

However, Keynes never provided the political manifesto required to deepen his economic ideology in the minds of his followers. His empirical, softer form of capitalism may have unseated Adam Smith, but Keynes still deeply advocated for free markets and entrepreneurship (Burgin, 2012). This allowed classically-inspired economists to continue their work. Just as the context provided Keynes with the opportunity to rise to stardom, the stability and growth experienced by the dominant Western Political Economies (i.e., United States, England, France, Germany, etc) in the decades following World War II would create a space for neoclassical economics to come out of the shadows. This was in part due to conservative-leading political groups who were able to inject these revitalized cases for the free market into Western politics (Phillips-Fein, 2009).

Milton Freidman, supported by the work of Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek, would provide the framework within which corporate interests could reassume the influence they had pre-Keynes. Mises believed a centralized, or “planned”, economy could not be as innovative or efficient at allocation and distribution of resources because governments could not respond to consumers’ demands as well freely-acting entrepreneurs (Von Mises, 1944). Hayek, a student of Mises, came to prominence in England as an opposing voice to Keynes with *Road to Serfdom* while at the London School of Economics. Freidman, on the other hand, became the dominant political economist in the United States with *Capitalism and Freedom*. Freidman and Hayek believed that the purpose of capitalism was to promote freedom and keep totalitarianism and communism at bay (Burgin, 2012). Freidman and Hayek’s desire to address totalitarianism and communism made them politically viable in the post-war period without the economic intervention of Keynesian policy attracted corporate interests. Their positions of influence in the US and England also built the space within which Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher could work together to promote what would become known as neoliberalism on a global scale.

After the turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s, US American politics saw a merging of social conservatives’ desire for order, religious conservatives’ desire for tradition and corporate interests. Corporations began to take an active role in politics, providing incentives for management hopefuls to go to business school instead of earning that title by working their way up as it had traditionally been, giving reading materials to individuals. An example of this is Ronald Reagan, who received his political economy education as a spokesperson for GE (Reagan, 1964). As this spread globally, it also became grounded in domestic politics. Even moderate Democrats like President Clinton made statements like “end welfare as we know it” and “era of big government is over”. During a town hall event, a college student asked House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi about millennials’ increased open-mindedness to socialism in relation to baby boomers to which she replied “we are capitalists” (Washington Post, 2016; American Presidency Project, 1996).

The facilitated research of Hayek, Mises and Freidman pushed the US American political economy into a neoclassical, conservative era. Religious and social conservatives were mobilized and influenced by

the spread of ideas through technological innovation. Talk radio, “televangelists” and other forms of social commentary emerged to push back against “big government” and its interventionist tendencies (Phillips-Fein, 2009). Neoliberalism, the emergent ideology, would provide a context-specific conglomeration of neoclassical economics implemented through Keynesian interventionism. It would mostly seek to meet the needs of those who funded it, corporate interests, but it also allowed for the essential causes of the social and religious conservatives to come into the mainstream (Phillips-Fein, 2009). Low taxes were not just for corporations since they also helped small businesses and farmers and, more importantly, low taxes symbolized “small” government letting citizens be free.

The gradual exposure of these types of inconsistencies allowed for the pendulum is in the process of swinging back towards liberal values. The tide is surging back due to the failures of the dogmatic portrayals of complex systems within “Econ 101”. Introductory, and even intermediate, economics courses offer little more than the ideology of the free market, only exposing students to statements like “attempts to repeal the laws of supply and demand usually backfire, and sometimes produce results virtually the opposite of those intended” (Baumol and Blinder, 2012). Neoclassical economics is derived from the insights of the 1600s, 1700s and 1800s and their refinement by Hayek, Freidman and Mises. They have been developed into a Truth instead of remaining the loosely tied set of philosophical perspectives they once were.

Regardless of their differences, Hayek and Keynes believed in the power of ideas. Hayek once said “what to the contemporary observer appears as the battle of conflicting interests has indeed often been decided long before in a clash of ideas confined to narrow circles.” (Hayek, 1949). Keynes stated that “practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist” and “I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas”. Karl Marx, in some ways the nemesis of the two, also saw ideas as an important way to change society and its institutions. He argued that there is a difference between the “material transformation of the economic conditions of production” and the “ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out” (Tucker, 1972).

Political Economy, both theoretically and practically, is deeply affected by ideology. Understanding the oscillation of power between liberals and conservatives after the Great Depression requires exploring what and whom both sides' ideologies are for on a deeper level and not only what they suggest. Without engagement with the conflict arising from the evolution of these ideological institutions, the hope of positive peace through transcendence of this conflict, evaporates. Both liberals and conservatives crafted their respective ideologies as a community of theories. Just as communities of people must engage constructively to pursue their collective interests in alignment with their collective values, these ideologies must engage in dialogue with divergent, competitive theories. This "conversation" is the only way to create a space in which dominant ideologies can face the ways in which they devalue and diminish the potential of noncompliant ones.

Even if Keynes and Smith were omniscient, the ideas they advanced could not promote contextualized, holistic and durable policy making because they are not practiced as prescribed. Though Adam Smith came up with the idea of the "invisible hand" (the precursor of the free market), he argued that some goods and services should remain outside of the marketplace (Smith, 1776). Even though one of his examples was of national defense, there is a US American military industrial complex with large private firms (i.e., Blackwater, Lockheed Martin, etc). Though John Maynard Keynes believed in the capacity of governments to intervene in the economy, he argued that macroeconomic monetary policy should be used to keep investment stable, not fiscal policy to maintain consumption levels (Steil, 2013). In spite of this, US American financial policy and banking has facilitated a culture of consumption instead of continuing the investments of the New Deal era. As I stated earlier, Keynes argued classical economics assumed its effects away. Similarly, neoclassical economics struggles to acknowledge and embrace complex reality through how it expresses itself theoretically and practically.

Alternative economists' writings provide insight into the impact of this conflict between one's self-enlightened interest and institutions within Western society. Ann Pettifor (2006) argues that the financial industry has "successfully manipulated, evaded and discredited Christian moral and ethical standards – in particular the contempt of usury – that placed limits on the capital gains made by money-lenders and other

financial institutions” since the time of John Calvin (early to mid-1500s) (Pettifor, 2006). Janet Poppendieck (1998) argues that the failure of charity to provide “fundamental solutions to the problems of deepening poverty and growing inequality” is derived from the ecosystem of “joys and demands of personal charity” which encourages “charity [to] replace entitlements and charitable endeavor [to] replace politics”. Instead of charitable institutions advancing solutions, they leave “the way wide open to those who want more inequality, not less” (Poppendieck, 1998). Considering not only the duration of this conflict, but the way in which this conflict is waged in a destructive manner, broader and deeper consequences emerge.

Today, the mainstream economists sympathetic to liberal values are crafting economic ideas, illustrating the way in which the pendulum is swinging back. Economists such as Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, are speaking to institutions that fail due to “elite capture” and are warning against the high levels of income inequality. Lesser-known Janet Poppendieck’s research on private charities and entitlement programs has produced her term the “Wenceslas Syndrome”. She defines this as “The joys and demands of personal charity” make us more focused on maintaining and supporting our efforts. She says we look over the “fundamental solutions to the problems of deepening poverty and growing inequality”, leaving “the way wide open to those who want more inequality, not less.” Poppendieck sees the Syndrome is a “collective process that affects our entire society as charity replaces entitlements and charitable endeavor replaces politics” (Poppendieck, 1998). These and other liberal thinkers are pushing ideas that have begun to percolate through the liberal collective conscious and are challenging the thinking of the 1900s. If liberals are not compassionately mindful in how they adopt these ideas, they may fail to acknowledge that conservatives desire to have their needs met as well. This failure could result in the continued movement of the pendulum instead of a more stable dynamic equilibrium.

Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is a widely discussed framework for understanding how needs are met. Physiological or “primitive” (food, water, shelter, etc) needs define the base of this pyramid. The second level is security which can extend from physical safety all the way to job security in times of peace. Next is a sense of belonging since humans are considered to require social and emotional ties to achieve a sense of equilibrium. Esteem needs is similar to what Smith stated above (“being beloved”) yet it

also includes self-love. Last is self-actualization which is could be simply defined as the pursuit of one's potential (Taormina and Gao, 2013). Achievement of one's potential is synonymous with what Smith refers to as happiness as coming to a stop. The denial of these needs results in a disequilibrium within the self, producing the perception of a "glass ceiling" halting the pursuit of one's potential.

Violence is defined by the reduction of a community's potential to meet their needs in culturally relevant ways. Johan Galtung (1969) states that violence is "... the cause of the difference between the potential and actual, between what could have been and what is." Galtung (1969) goes further to define violence as "that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which impedes the decrease of this distance" and "avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to life, lowering the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible" (Galtung 1990). SIT Professor Tatsushi Arai took this definition and condensed it, stating that violence is "Any form of social influence harming the human body, mind, and/or spirit, directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally" (Arai, 2016).

I use a definition of conflict as a community perceiving another as impeding their development. LeBaron and Pillay (2006) defines conflict as a perceived incompatibility between multiple parties that constrains their ways of feeling, thinking and being. What makes conflict difficult to transcend is when these parties are interdependent yet derive different meaning and experiences from their shared identity (M. LeBaron and V. Pillay, 2006). Therefore, even if they are both US American, differences in quality of life and other socioeconomic divides, how those divides came to be and what they say about the parties can make them turn inward. Though they require the same resources for similar needs and wants, this focus reinforces divides, making cultural markers even more important for maintaining status within a party's in-group and distinguishing themselves from the "other".

These divides become more complex when communities are "nested" within and beside one another. Instead of single tensions between groups to exist, this framework envisions conflicts between and within various communities and their elements and across a variety of issues in an interdependent, web-like manner (Dugan, 1996). If resources are sufficiently accessible to all conflict parties, escalation of conflict may not



occur since the involved groups can meet their needs. However, when institutions promote allocation of resources in a way that aligns with values and interests within one community while ignoring the needs of others, conflict may arise even if resources are sufficient to meet the needs of the meta-community. In order for institutions to promote the virtuous cycles that maintain peace and prosperity, they must support the systems that encourage constructive yet empathetic engagement between and within communities.

Institutions structures that facilitate behavior, attitudes and beliefs. They are the frameworks within ecosystems that support and maintain intra- and inter-personal, intra- and inter-group dynamics. Geoffrey Hodgson (2006) that sees institutions “as systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions”. Rules are “socially transmitted through customary normative injunction or immanently normative disposition”. To summarize a rule, Hodgson (2009) states that “in circumstances X do Y”. He explicitly states that behavior and institutions are separate since the prior happens within the decision architecture of, and is thereby influenced by, the latter (Hodgson, 2006). Friedrich Hayek, a giant in neoclassical economics, posits that rules have a “little changing foundation of genetically inherited, ‘instinctive’ drives” as well as from logic and social interaction (Hayek, 1973).

Rules can be made simply to provide predictability and, thereby, trust and cooperation (Sosis and Ruffle, 2003). Hodgson (2006) states that “if the rule is scrutinized or contested, then normative issues will emerge” (Hodgson, 2006). The erosion of a rule, especially when it is connected to others, could destabilize a community. However, the rule may be deemed violent by the “other”, suggesting that it was created exclusively. Furthermore, Max Weber (1978) argues that a rule can exist “without any subjective formulation in thought of the ‘rule’”, making it also potentially violent when context shifts far enough from the one within which the rule was created.

Though an economist would use “law” or “theory” to describe a rule, the concept is the same. The subfield has crafted a societal position for itself to craft how we pursue and maintain wealth. Flora Michaels (2011) writes “in these early decades of the twenty-first century, the master story is economic: economic beliefs, values and assumptions are shaping how we think, feel and act.” (Michaels, 2011). The role of economics in our lives makes it a dominant institution in US American social reality yet it is not responsive

to the shifting context of the nation nor communities it attempts to shape. Instead, it has been influenced to facilitate “proper” behavior as deemed appropriate by the US American political economic elite. The Robert Solow, a modern influential economist, once said:

“There has always been a purist streak in economics that wants everything to follow neatly from greed, rationality and equilibrium with not ifs, ands or buts... The theory is neat, learnable, not terribly difficult, but technical enough to feel like ‘science.’ Moreover, it is practically guaranteed to give laissez-faire-type advice, which happens to fit nicely with the general turn to the right that began in the 1970s and may or may not be coming to an end” (Solow, 2008).

Hayek supports the first part of this statement, stating that “[referring to economics] the propensity to imitate as closely as possible the procedures of the brilliantly successful sciences... may lead to outright error” (Hayek, 1974).

Conflict transformation within the institution of Political Economy is required for the discipline to facilitate the emergence of positive peace in communities. Without transcending the divides between art and science, Keynes and Hayek and other diverging perspectives, Political Economy cannot serve inclusively. Conflict Transformation is a process by which a community understands “the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities” (Lederach, 2003). This means that a community is aware of how a context is slowly yet constantly shifting and is looking to conceptualize challenges with adaptive, as opposed to technical, solutions. This is to reduce violence and increase justice in relationships between people and groups through continuously updating institutions so that they are grounded in reality, rather than the expectations we bring from our chosen traumas and glories. Instead of the creative destruction of capitalistic societies, akin to sprinting and lying winded, a slower pace of evolution could be the source of innovation.

Without the destructiveness of the current modes of innovation, predictability, and eventually trust, could emerge. Peace manifests along a spectrum from negative to positive. Direct violence is a particular event or occurrence in space time as a concrete manifestation of cultural and structural violence (Galtung, 1969). Negative peace is the cessation of direct violence. Positive peace is the emergence of social justice, allowing for many or all groups within the community to achieve their own potentials (Galtung, 1990).

Though positive peace can only emerge when structural and cultural violence recedes, this study has a deep focus on structural violence within the institutions of economics.

An alternative vision for the institution of Political Economy must create institutions that have built in checks against assumptions or else they could allow for violence to emerge. This means that Political Economy must strive to facilitate adaptive work. Ronald Heifetz (1994) defines this kind of work to be when a community updates its beliefs, attitudes and actions to meet the challenges in front of it. Leaders conceptualizing alternative brands of political economy must naturally facilitate this inclusive, ground-up change by reimagining political economy so that it can “frame issues so that people would comprehend the opportunity and challenge to them” (Heifetz, 1994). This new way of practicing political economy brings it towards its more philosophical, contextualized roots.

This research is to encourage agents in US American Political Economy towards a different understanding of the context in which they advocate for their political economic truths. As Hayek was trying to wage ideological conflict upon the wave of US American democratic socialism in the early and mid-1900s, he appreciated the need for “secondhand dealers in ideas”. He believed that these individuals and groups should be motivated solely by the belief in the idea itself and not personal or in-group gain at the beginning (Hayek, 1949). Though many would assume that stridently, boldly defending liberal values is the best way to spread the ideas of Stiglitz, Pettifor, Poppendieck and others. However, liberals may become better advocates not through closing their ranks, but by opening their hearts and minds.

Just as liberals argue that conservatives seem unable to see particular issues with an objective eye, they, too, must be aware of their own assumptions. Damien Cahill and Martijn Konings (2017) argue that the way in which liberal scholars have understood neoliberalism is not as convincing as some of their readership argues. Crafting an understanding of this ideology as the product of the efforts of the political and economic elites to revive classical economics and, thereby, capitalism focuses on particular policy issues instead of a holistic understanding of the rise of this ideology. Histories of the conservative movement, such as Phillips-Fein (2009) and Burgin (2012), craft an interventionist narrative of the rise of neoliberalism. They do not discuss the role of “American exceptionalism” or rise of the standard of living that could have

facilitated the reduction of political engagement within the same groups that were so active before and during the Great Depression. Konings (2015) posits that arguments derived from Karl Polanyi's work sees money as "cold" and "devoid of human content". Money without a connection to humanity devalues the deep connection Max Weber (2002) made between Protestantism and capitalism in his writings. As liberals demand for their ideas to influence mainstream US Political Economy, they must also be aware of the role divergent thinking could play in not only improving their own thinking, but that of the nation as well.

Economics, a sub-institution of Political Economy, can contain the misdiagnosis and mistreatment of issues by becoming more inclusive. Divergent economists' ideas have given birth to subfields and, if mainstream economics begins to incorporate them, they could contribute immensely to an integrated Political Economy. These subfields have the capacity to challenge the assumptions of the mainstream, unearthing the bias that has been supporting them. If economists are more aware of the ways in which their perspectives are pulled by their experiences and education, maybe they can start supporting development efforts that are inclusive of other ways of knowing about satisfying basic human needs. Political economists should begin to think of themselves as holders of a truth, not the Truth, so they can be more humble and sustainable contributors to US American Political Economy.

## **Research Methodology**

This research is exploratory in the sense that I intentionally wander across and within many disciplines with the help of scholars, practitioners and scholar-practitioners. This is a journey to find how common ground is hidden by the stereotypes of the other we hold onto and how this could inform a theory of change to promote transcendence of the conflict of interest. This research project is participatory in the sense that allows for the diverse voices to contribute. I have read liberal thinkers and their progressive critics and the conservative political economists that critique both groups. I have attended panel discussions and talks at both liberal and conservative think tanks in Washington, DC to get a feel for their narratives in specific policy areas and the branches of the US Government today. I intend to incorporate the views of the

coastal elite, through being present in Washington, DC. I also hope that these views are tempered by also owning my childhood in suburbia and rural upstate New York and the administered survey.

### *Goals of Inquiry*

I am a person who believes that objectivity is an unreachable pursuit due to how subjective the process of experiencing, learning and remembering are. Instead of trying to be impartial speakers, we should be multi-partial listeners. Empathetic vibes towards those with whom we are engaged in dialogue can be reciprocated if we construct and then maintain discourse to do so. This is the way to produce inclusive, holistic knowledge upon which a community can constantly understand and reinvent itself.

The following is a list of aspirations I composed for the research proposal for this capstone. Though this was a requirement, I'm glad I wrote down what motivated and shaped my desires for this research. I share it here to be transparent in how my identities and hopes pulled my learning from the beginning of this project. Over the last two years, I have been hoping to:

- Gain a better understanding of how to research and then produce knowledge;
- Prepare myself to deepen and broaden my understanding of various American subcommunities pursue their interests in alignment with their values regarding work;
- Better position myself as a liberal scholar-advocate;
- Develop a deeper awareness of how economic thinking has narrowed options for solving issues;
- Improve my understanding of the feedback loops, stocks and flows and other system dynamics that maintain the conflict theatre of interest;
- Integrate my undergraduate and graduate work.

### *The Development of the Researcher's Positionality*

Though I was raised within US American working class and Haitian immigrant cultures, I have been fortunate to have been given the time and resources to do this research. Therefore, I see myself as having afforded a unique opportunity to prepare myself to be a peacebuilder within US American Political Economy. I also believe this due to my multiracial, multi-religious background, adoption of a multitude of philosophies and appreciation for various geographical regions and spaces. Due to what I was born into, I see myself as capable of existing between, as opposed to picking, sides. However, due to my values and interests, I have fundamental disagreements with the institutions crafted with the guidance of neoclassical economics. Understanding, and mounting counterarguments against, these institutions was my main interest as an undergraduate. On a personal level, this research is an attempt to check the bias of those left-leaning counterarguments. Though I feel I have failed to deeply understand my bias and the attitudes and beliefs it

perpetuates, just trying has taught me so much about a way of life to which I do not adhere. Simply trying to engage conservative ideology has made me feel that meaningful, fulfilling dialogue is possible: I have become a cautious optimist.

I began college by declaring mathematics and economics majors because all of my economics courses were quantitative and theoretical. One semester, I learned partial derivatives in an introductory math class and how to use partial derivatives to determine the optimum recipe for baking apple pies in my intermediate microeconomics class. However, I always saw cooking as having a more equitable balance between art and science. “Why would I not use preferences of my family or clientele or the recipe my grandmother passed down?” Since undergraduates were allowed to enroll in graduate courses, I saw how the economists from low- and middle-income countries received a similar education. I began to take courses in theatre, Africana studies, leadership studies, cultural theory, psychology, to force me to engage the set of values and interests thrust upon me by economics as I was taught about it. I began to believe that economics could not be taught to create more economists. Instead, these courses that could have been potential distractions eventually became what convinced me to work in the field of development, broadly defined.

Upon completing my undergraduate studies, I had a divergent understanding of what Political Economy was for, who could practice and study it and in what ways. This was not only informed by the theory with which I was exposed, but also practical experience. When I interned at a think tank in Cape Town, South Africa, I was responsible for data management, statistical analysis and survey editing. I left wondering why there weren't there economics students with more contextual awareness than myself who could do this research. I began to question the focus on quantitative analyses when conversations with my soccer teammates produced more deeply embedded, holistic information to understand the issues communities faced. I worked for an advocacy group in New York State and federal politics. I saw how the context within which organizations advanced, sustained and defended their values and interests. These organizations' capacities were profoundly influenced by the ecosystem of sociopolitical dynamics within which they had to recruit talent and funding streams and wage conflict with allies and adversaries.

It concerns me that Political Economy's theoretical frameworks are so detached from the realities with which real people deal. I worry that instead of ensuring the field continuously works to improve its capacity to solve issues society faces, incentives exist to encourage the sub-institutions (i.e., economics, political science, etc), and the scholars and practitioners within them, to shape society in ways that make Political Economy increasingly more relevant. It is as if the institution of Political Economy is a living organism seeking to meet its own needs within academic ecosystem. The focus seems to be on perpetuating Political Economy, rather than making development align with communities' values and interests.

I acknowledge that I cannot produce an "objective" portrayal of what conflict and development are. Though I do not ascribe to the liberalism that the United States has practiced, I would be considered a liberal. This research was started with the hope of highlighting opportunities for Political Economy to become a more service-oriented, positive-peace-promoting field of scholarship and practice. My hope has been for Political Economy to become a force for reducing the ways in which potential is diminished so that alternative viewpoints can truly coexist with more traditional perspectives. The vibrancy and resilience of one group should not mean that another is less so: I do not believe in zero-sum games. I aspire to see a Political Economy that is a platform where hopes and dreams for development meet with those who can find the unconventionally viable pathways for making them reality.

### *Conceptual Framework of Research*

The goal of the theoretical and practical research is to bring critical theory into the field of Political Economy. Critical methodologies are posit that power is ubiquitous, making analyses without it fail at describing an environment. Critical approaches "reject and challenge binary categories that seek to polarize and essentialize difference" so seeing research as in or out of a particular discipline—and thereby making an implicit decision on its relevance or positionality within a research project—seems out of step with critical theory (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). This branch is very wary of absolute truths and see "the traditional positivist scientific process ultimately creates knowledge that is used to maintain (justify, fortify,

reconstruct) the status quo in which minorities are oppressed through the reproduction of dominant ideology” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011).

The purpose of a “critical political economy theory” is to bring analytical perspectives into a field that does not go far enough to challenge the public view that the free market, when left to its own devices, will make everyone better off. I argue that this field has always been normative and built upon Western post-Enlightenment Truth. I argue has intentionally crafted itself to seem positive and mathematical to argue its positionality as the Truth. I am merging qualitative and quantitative economic analyses of the past with critical theory in order to describe the impact of the rise of neoliberal economics.

I define myself as an antisciplinary in the way that desire to simultaneously disregard and engage with academic disciplines that organically develops out of the knowledge I seek to obtain. I let my research pull me as much as I structured it. I did not desire to constrict the knowledge I gain by the methods others create to articulate their perspectives and experiences: I aim to let it breathe and live. I practiced interdisciplinarity in order to obtain the insights of various disciplines by focusing on the defining theories and their critiques. I was transdisciplinary in the way that I encouraged a dialogue between these normative suggestions to facilitate constructive conflict and innovative thought. Though I happened to engage with more fields than notable scholars in political economy, my research evaded some fields for the sake of practicality, making me multidisciplinary as well. I hope I made my decisions and their impacts on this study clear by discussion my positionality throughout this paper.

### *Sample Selection and Data Collection and Analysis*

The sample was conceptualized as a way of understanding how people speak about conflict and development within US American domestic politics. Initially, the sample was going to be academics and practitioners within the field of US American domestic development. Though it may have been helpful to discuss how political conflict constrains development with community development practitioners, this sample was eventually rejected considering the adherence to theoretical discourse within academia. Policy facilitators, a profession that focuses on maintaining diverse coalitions for legislative and policy change, was



another sample option. However, this group was too supportive of constructive discourse and focused on climate policy.

I ended up deciding to do a survey instead of one-on-one interviews or focus groups. Engaging with the two options above made me realize that I, as a researcher, valued breadth over depth. This meant that I had to conduct a survey in order to obtain as large a number of participants as possible. Though this meant that I could not receive and analyze explanations for answers, I felt that the addition of open-ended questions, in combination with demographic information, could provide some information to guide how I tied responses to the condition out of which they emerged.

This conclusion also made me realize that I deeply valued the experience of everyday people over professionals. Though I appreciate the work that those directly or indirectly affiliated with development do, I felt that this research project was more about the layperson and I wanted to know how they felt. Living in Washington, DC a huge part of this decision because attending talks at the Brookings Institute, the United States Institute of Peace or any of the other esteemed institutions in that city made me see how divided these academics and practitioners were from the people they were supposed to be serving. This decision was an attempt to influence research back towards the grassroots.

I posted surveys on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn in order to collect the qualitative data required to temper the academic research with more practically grounded perspectives. I assumed that because I have had the privilege of being able to associate with a variety of groups through opportunities I have been given, I would have a more diverse sample from which to pull. Also, since the goal was to understand how liberals craft their stereotypes of conservatives, having a liberal-biased sample may have been an asset, not a liability.

This survey was both analyzed through the tools provided by SurveyMonkey and exported files within Microsoft Excel. After this stage of analysis, the data were contextualized within theory. I also analyzed the data with an eye towards how responses had the potential to narrow or open the set of solutions for decision makers. This was complimented by relating responses in the open-ended questions to

demographic data. Trends within the open-ended responses were noted and they, too, were contextualized within political economy, peacebuilding and other academic literature.

### *Findings*

The drawback to using social media was made clear by how my positionality affected the participant pool to which I had access, affecting the demographic responses. The vast majority of the 78 participants were between twenty-four and thirty-five years old (63%) and had either graduate (50%) or undergraduate (41%) degrees. Most were from New England (32%) and the Mid-Atlantic (35%) regions of the United States. Most participants self-identified as male (61%) as opposed to female (37%) or gender fluid (1%). Considering how many participants were from suburban (44%) and rural (25%), it was not surprising to get such a high number of white participants (70%), even though 24% of the participants were from urban areas. Though many participants were Agnostic (41%) and Christian (36%), religious diversity exists in this survey. On a scale of 0 to 100, the vast majority of participants ranked themselves below average, producing a mean of 38, in their dedication to their religion.

Questions regarding political and socioeconomic identity were also not dissimilar by my own preferences. Participants were mostly liberal (41%), followed by very liberal (25%), independent (24%) and conservative (8%). Considering my interest in understanding how progressives are biased, I did not see this as a serious issue. With regard to class, a value of 57 out of a scale of 0 to 100 emerged, illustrating that the majority of participants saw themselves as part of the middle or upper middle classes. Their responses to questions about political conflict were not unexpected for a liberal-leaning group and they are grouped in the three, interconnected sections below.

## **Discussion**

Though the sample did not stray too far from identities I claim to hold myself, it was still a humbling experience to have my assumptions discredited by the data. The conclusions I drew from the survey fundamentally altered how I engaged with people. I began to care more about their feelings and the language

they used to express themselves as opposed to exclusively focusing on the content of what they were saying. I began to become more conscious of the role of other forms of communication (i.e., body language, pitch, etc.) during conversations with people who shared their feelings with me. Instead of launching into deep, tough conversations, I have begun to respect the timing of a conversation and the space I am in when I have it. Doing the follow up research to link the data to theory was a pleasure and I hope it will help both scholars and practitioners engage within and between themselves as they strive to develop the United States.

### *State of Conflict*

The lack of meaningful dialogue between liberals and conservatives results in a version of US Political Economy that diminishes both of their capacities to self-express. Both liberals and conservatives maintain the prevailing belief that the “other” will not constructively engage. This maintains how both communities’ willingness expending resources into defining themselves in opposition to their perceived adversary, escalating the conflict. Defining the relationship in such combative terms makes the “paranoid” style sustainable through polarization between and within conflict parties. Liberals and conservatives’ “paranoia” begins to emerge in more issues and they both seek to gain additional subgroups or deepen their inner support.

US American Political Economy, as an institution, seems to jerk itself through spacetime. One explanation is that US American subcommunities lack the will or capacity to engage in dialogue to unearth unconventionally viable solutions. The “paranoid style” posits that political minorities understand their issues of concern to be symptoms of fiendish, evil groups enacting destruction upon their way of life (Hofstadter, 1964). This has a deep effect upon how they understand, model and respond to the world around them. The “paranoid style” resonated with how participants described the lack of dialogue in US American politics. “Paranoia”, as described by Hofstadter (1964) also seemed to describe how the adoption of extreme, unreasonable positions put US Americans in moral jeopardy. Radical positions, regardless if they are on the right or left, may prevent the maintenance of values and interests up to the standards of their

predecessors. When the “other” is the one pointing out the discontinuity, grabbing on tighter to the ideology may be easier than admitting failure to both the “other” and one’s predecessors.

I argue that the lack of coherence emerges out of this inner conflict that conflict with the “other” emerges. For example, freedom in its purest form (i.e., “I can do whatever I want”) is limited if we also believe in equality. These two liberal values, though attractive in theory, craft a precarious situation when put into practice. Those who feel slighted by the “System” or “Man” push back in an attempt to re-achieve that harmony between their values and interests. However, the inability to maintain one’s values in alignment with their interests results in a disjointed existence. The lack of integration keeps traumatic events and contexts present in the minds of conflict parties. The adherence to rigid, radical positions reduces the individual and collective capacities to listen to the inner voice that is the compass.

In US American Political Economy, neither political party loses or wins substantial, durable steps towards their vision of their nation while also addressing the root of issues. Critiques emerging from different prioritizations of values and interests facilitate fracturing within the liberal and conservative communities. When a political party is in power, this prevents a united front against the perceived adversary who desires to regain their lost influence. This results in the belief that the adversary has infiltrated the party and only total victory will eradicate a villain of such strength (Hofstadter, 1964). In response, other groups within the same party further radicalize themselves. During this fracturing, the party that was out of power sees the need to come together to take advantage of the squabbling party. They seek common ground and work to mobilize their followers as the party in power ceases to be a viable political entity for the next election. The next election, the party in power is voted out and the cycle begins anew, this time with a new party in charge. When this is understood in relation to nested theory, these cycles are nested within each other. This means that over time, the spiritual toll of these cycles begin to last beyond each renewal, complicating and layering their “paranoia” across policy domains and election cycles. This drain of energy and focus could prove costly, particularly when engaging other nations with longer time horizons.

The cyclical nature of this conflict has grinded the United States into gridlock. The current state of ideological conflict encouraging of the positions we see today within the liberal and conservative communities. So called “one issue voters”, “protest votes” and other forms of over-commitment push people from a solving, collaborative mindset to a more competitive one. The issue, however, is not that competitors exist, but that they are so loud in discourse in relation to collaborators. It is this imbalance that makes the size of the set of unconventionally viable solutions narrow, reducing the flexibility by which conflicts can be transformed towards transcendence.

However, United States has yet to reach a deep enough sense of motionlessness that jump starts the desire to intentionally de-escalate ideological conflict. This allows political and economic conflicts to escalate without any clear path beyond the system dynamics which maintain the constraint growth and repeal of regulation. When rigid ideologies form and are believed in by liberals and conservatives, weakened moderates and, due to campaign finance laws, empowered special interests become the only network brokers. This gives special interests, as nodes of the sociopolitical network that connects US American institutions, an increased capacity to prune and nurture regulation according to their interests until their bias is exposed. It seems as the impact of the unthinkable happening is often large enough to shake worldviews, but not to encourage the faithful to adapt their attitudes in relation to larger forces. I would like to see future research about civic infrastructure and civil society to address how ideological faith encourages the perception of unthinkable realities, regardless of the context.

### *The role of the moderate in dialogue*

Though this spacetime is not conducive to being a moderate, it was still interesting to see how so many individuals self-identified as one of the dominant ideologies (conservative or liberal) or to opt out by selecting independent. Very few people distinguished themselves further and only one participant self-identified as a moderate. When it came to the US American economy, moderates were described directly as “confused” or “unsure” by several respondents.

Other participants in this survey stated the lack of a middle, going as far as believing that moderates did not exist in this particular space of political discourse or the reasonable minds had vacated the middle. This perception of the moderate as either nonexistent or not capable of being a constructive political actor could be a symptom of the context. Like other times in US American history, partisanship is high and tensions between parties seems to only get more dramatic with each news cycle. However, there are steps scholar-practitioners recommend for those who can and would step into what has become a political “No Man’s Land” to these participants.

One respondent posited that moderates are defined by their risk aversion. This may have been meant politically, in the words of another participant, a moderate “spends too much on war but not enough to end the war. Meanwhile, civilian pop is left in hot water without strong social safety nets”. It could also mean that they are not willing to take a stand on an issue by committing to a policy or set of values, making them seem as someone who cannot lead because they have not chosen a side. However, moderates may be exactly the individuals capable of assuming adaptive leadership. Other participants stated moderates are also defined by their “Willingness to experience a hardship or imposition in order to better the group” and valuing of “parts of both economic ideologies”, they could be able to ask questions like “does this war help define us as a community?” or “are these resources better spent elsewhere?”.

Bernard Meyer (2004) puts forward a perspective that provides a more nuanced perspective on what it means to facilitate constructive engagement. He posits that conflict resolution practitioners should focus less about being in the middle and more about being a conflict expert with an awareness of the structure and culture of the groups involved and the context in which they are engaged. This opens who a neutral can be someone more akin to a referee who has the trust of both sides. The neutral may own their perspective and how it molds their opinions, but they must be aware of how their positionality can be interpreted by others. Therefore, what may be preventing the existence of the moderate is a context in which liberals and conservatives *believe* that the middle doesn’t exist. It is not that people empathetic to both sides are not around, but that there is a durable perception that no one can possibly hold liberal and conservative values.

There may be people who would like to de-escalate a heated political discussion during a family discussion, but they don't have people at the table that are willing to identify them as neutral and a bridge.

Analysis of the word clouds showed some controversial topics. "Government" and values and interests associated with liberal or progressive economics ("social", "community" and "safety net") were both used 32 times in responses. They were used in questions regarding the definitions of both liberals and conservatives, illustrating how the role of government in the economy is a key point in any discourse between and among the two political orientations. This was particularly evident by the frequency of "taxes" and "low taxes", which appeared twelve times and it was a defining feature of the economic conservative.

Questions regarding the definition of a liberal and a conservative both used "belief" or "believe", but it was nonexistent in the description of a moderate. The quantitative analysis and qualitative investigation of this phenomenon were not sophisticated enough to give adequate support for a particular explanation. It could be that the positionality of US American ideological conflict could be such that moderates are getting drowned out. Another possibility is that moderates do not have the will or capability to speak up.

The qualitative data and research show that there are rigid perceptions which have formed about aspects of an issue about which conflict parties are discussion. Therefore, it was not surprising when participants seemed pessimistic regarding constructive engagement during dialogue. One respondent identified as very liberal illustrated what seemed to be the mainstream view. The participant said that they "would [reach across the aisle] because some compromise is necessary, however, the other side's values are antithetical to mine, they are misinformed, and stalwartly against compromise themselves. There is no foundation for real dialogue, substantive debate, or fair negotiations."

Meyer (2004) argues that there are several needs individuals or groups have when they enter a discussion: voice, procedural justice, vindication, validation and safety. These interwoven needs provide the sustenance for people to engage, even if it is destructively. A facilitator or mediator needs to find ways to make conflict parties feel like their needs are met to get them to the table (Meyer, 2004). Keeping the groups at the table is another challenge. A participant stated that engaging with the other was "exhausting" and

another mentioned how difficult conversations were without “respect and acceptance”. Meyer (2009) argues that we must “stay with conflict” even if avoidance is more comfortable. This requires a commitment to keeping pathways of conversation open by crafting agreements and systems that can sustain the conflict parties over time. Neutrals must be more aware of the ways they can support the communities to which they belong to remain in discourse with the “other” (Meyer, 2009). Meanwhile, in order to maintain the moderate, communities must support those who are willing and able to assume the role of the compassionate mindful neutral. This feedback loop must be nurtured for “respect and acceptance” to emerge.

People feel the need to be heard, preferably by authorities, with the hope of being on equal footing with their adversary so the opponent impeding their pursuit of justice can be seen as the evil doer. Though there was no mention of an influential neutral, participants often stated their belief in the wrongness of the other. One participant summed it up well, saying “When I talk to conservatives, I am shocked at their refusal to accept facts provided by science and education, if the facts do not agree with their reality.” Dialogue participants also want to feel like their struggle is acknowledged, allowing them to impact their own situation and influence the broader issues that impact them and their group. An individual that self-identified as very liberal and stated they “are not a very big fan of the Democratic party” believes that “too busy trying to pull the Democratic party to the left to worry about what the bad-faith conservative elites are lying to their base about”. Since this participant did not see the Democratic party as a neutral platform, they were “busy” attempting to pull it towards a space where their views would be seen and heard. Without this movement, the participant could not adequately influence their surroundings and the nation more broadly.

Last, but not least, they want to feel safe, or else they will not be inclined to engage genuinely and constructively (Meyer, 2004). Though “fear” only appeared twice in the questions about reaching across the aisle, it resonated deeply with comments other participants made. Commentary on wasting time, validating the others incorrect perspective or a lack of reciprocity could be tied to fear of seeming naïve to other liberals. More research on the role of fear in impeding dialogue in this context would be useful.



The very liberal participant's words are also a blunt illustration the way in which other participants thought engaging conservatives was a waste of time. The word "consensus" appeared eight times in the two questions about reaching across the aisle yet the overwhelming belief of participants was that this could not happen. I argue this is where the perception about moderates and lack of constructive dialogue come together. Participants did not see a viable neutral entity they could engage to share how their values manifest in the fears and hopes they have for their country.

The moderate may require a new leadership paradigm. One individual stated that they didn't reach "across the aisle" because they were not in a position of power. Ronald Heifetz (1994) empowers us by defining leadership as an activity, not a positionality. Therefore, we lead by shifting our attitudes towards those which promote our respective groups' capacity to adapt to a new reality as opposed to entrenching in avoidance of it. This means that institutions for a community of any size, support the participation of individuals, instead of increasing the power distance between elected officials and those that elected them. Instead of giving into the urge to follow elected officials that sow discord between groups, citizens may begin to see those candidates as incapable of leading. Leadership as an activity empowers the grassroots to constructively engage moderates and, eventually, those on the other side of the aisle.

The conflict resolution field offers perspectives that individuals that are deserving of the trust of conflict parties can use to maintain that trust and promote constructive engagement. Arai (2009) urges us to be creative in how we solve (*not win*) incompatibility. This means conflict parties must open the perceived size of the solution set through existing at the interface of unconventionality and viability, what Tatsushi Arai (2009) defines as creativity. This requires individuals with the capacity or willingness to hold multiple identities in a conflict to facilitate an atmosphere within which existing reality is re-seen by scholars and practitioners.

*Faith as a non-religious asset*

The faith in empiricism to ground broader assumptions about humanity and the world is beginning to facilitate conflict between liberals and conservatives. This is most clear in terms of climate change, but beliefs and science are perceived to contradict each other in other policy domains as well. When economists are cavalier in their efforts to craft rigorous studies and draw good conclusions from the data, policymakers that see positivism as a way to reduce bias, and therefore rely upon economists, can be dangerous. Failing to engage with the bias inherent to the way in which the study is catered to an audience (i.e., funding source, politician, political bloc, etc) results in violent policy outcomes. This requires constant re-regulation as opposed to a more flexible, adaptive structure that improves in its capacity to advise in the face of complexity.

The United States, under the liberal-leaning, post-World War II regime, grew into what some social scientists refer to as a WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) nation. Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan (2010) claims that US Americans pursued and produced human psychological and behavioral studies upon which social scientist relied for their conclusions. However, due to the sample bias caused by the WEIRD-ness of the participants, this resulted in an empirical understanding of the how societies work that is based upon a very narrow slice of humanity (Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan, 2010). This, Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan (2010) claims, has resulted in the behavioral sciences being insufficiently careful regarding the assumptions they make. Therefore, when policymakers consult academia and thinkers about how to craft incentives, they model upon the outliers instead of the mainstream.

The fundamental truths of economics are at stake due to the way in which academics have constructed their field. Economists have built a model that of a human as a “consumer who knows what he or she wants and makes the most of the available opportunities”. This individual finds their satisfaction from consuming a particular set of goods and services and it is measured in “utility”. “[T]he assumption that consumers maximize utility helps [economists] think clearly about consumer choice” however they “don’t expect to measure [it] in practice” (Krugman and Wells, 2009). Paul Samuelson, Kenneth Arrow and Gerard Debreu investigated this more deeply, but ended up producing normative models within the cultural context they lived and were studying. Those who pulled from this particular strain of utility maximization theory

considered decisions that violated the Weak Axiom of Revealed Preference or the Generalized Axiom of Revealed Preferences were deemed irrational (Fehr and Glimcher, 2009).

The contributions of subfields could facilitate the emergence of middle ground between the “camps” within economics. However, due to the lack of inclusion within this discipline, the camps become increasingly divergent. The subfield of neuroeconomics “seeks to ground microeconomic theory in details about how the brain works” (Camerer, 2007). Furthermore, in line with Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan (2010), utility could be based upon a WEIRD sample, making cross-cultural development strategies likely to facilitate development for only a small slice of the community of interest.

The failure of those who claim to draw from Keynesian economics to deliver on their promises of economic stability provides ammunition for the conservatives who claim that liberals are “ruining America”. Liberals that take positions through valuing empirical studies, as opposed to taking stands on principles, can be seen as amoral. It the perceived lack of a code of ethics makes it hard for liberals to argue for their policies. Instead, they may discuss how conservatives are wrong to not rely upon science to make their decisions. Both groups are arguing about their positions, rather than sharing their underlying values and interests, resulting in a battle of beliefs instead of a solving mindset.

Increases in the sophistication of empirical methodologies and technologies has seemed to shift faith from religious forms to scientific varieties instead of reducing the human desire to craft a Truth to follow. This results in the maintenance of narratives as opposed to constantly recontextualizing values and reevaluating interests in alignment with shifts in context. Therefore, what distinguishes WEIRD societies is not their wealth, egalitarianism, levels of literacy or economic capacity, but their disregard for sustainability and the ensuing violence to future generations and other societies. By not respecting the power of time and space, WEIRD societies are not maintaining in alignment with what came before them and what exists around them. It is this perceived lack of respect that could be what makes conservatives so frustrated.

*The role of faith in maintenance of ideological resilience*

A dominant thread within the open-ended questions, regarding difficulties for the participant and the group they perceive to be the other, was about faith. Though low levels of commitment to a religion were reported, I do not mean faith in a religious sense. I mean to say that participants seemed to believe that the “other” was incapable of engaging constructively because of their commitment to their creed or ideology. Participants that defined themselves as liberal or very liberal stated that “myopic” conservatives don’t “deserve that validation”. Other self-identifying liberals defined liberals as “open minded” and stated that the “Democratic party seems pretty moderate economically”. Participants that self-identified as liberal displayed faith in their in-group to the degree that it affected how they understood their political compliment.

The issue of ideological faith in political economy is not only one of the present context, but one that has plagued the discipline throughout time. Though contemporary economists, and those they influence, believe the field of economics to be value-less, its roots say otherwise. Economists, such as Milton Freidman, argued that as the field aged, it became a “‘positive’ science focused on describing what is” and a “value free zone” (Raworth, 2017). George Mankiw, an author of many modern economics textbooks, defines the field as “the study of how society manages its scarce resources” (Mankiw, 2012). This led Presidents like John F. Kennedy to claim that economic decision making had ceased being “some grand warfare of rival ideologies” that “sweep the country with passion”; economic policy had become the “practical management of a modern economy” (Kennedy, 1962). However, Thomas Kuhn argued that “scientists work from models acquired through education... often without quite knowing or needing to know what characteristics have given these models the status of community paradigms.” (Kuhn, 1962) These paradigms, and the contexts in which they were developed, had a deep impact upon economic theory.

Keynes and Hayek were products of their environments. Keynes believed in government intervention to do what private enterprise didn’t, not to replace entrepreneurs, when free market capitalism reigned. On the other hand, under Mises’ tutelage, Hayek was encouraged to explore the flaws of Keynesian or “counter-cyclical” (saving during economic booms and to afford spending during contractions to maintain an equilibrium) economic policy just as Keynesian thought was spreading like wildfire. Eventually, though

Hayek did not see Keynesian logic as his mentor did, he believed it would ultimately encourage irrational economics and socialism. Hayek's time at NYU allowed him to study "pro-cyclical" policy (encouraging private borrowing during booms and austerity during contractions), illustrating even interventions intended to help private enterprise led to disequilibrium.

Faith in capitalism, as they believed it should be practiced, is what allowed these two men to remain steadfast in the way that they defended it. Keynes was considered to be a "brilliant and original thinker" who had the ear of the British government and an "obstinate and self-centered" financial investor that could spend his mornings checking on the markets. Living in an individualistic society in which he was rewarded for his work could have made him into a preacher of capitalism. Instead of shaking his faith in capitalism, the Great Depression only solidified his desire to explain how the ideology could be practiced more perfectly. Keynes' views on monetary policy were motivated by his desire to prevent the economic instability out of which people could sympathize with socialists and fascists, as they did in Germany after World War II. Though a young Hayek had socialist leanings, his intense desire to be an academic allowed him to be shaped by a scholar of the stature of Mises. Though he considered his study of law to be a "sideline", he had an awareness of the ways economic rules could be written. He personally experienced how policy, such as printing vast sums of money, could impact wages while working for as a legal assistant in the Austrian government after World War I. Studying the business cycle gave him what seemed to be a clear-eyed view of the ways an economy naturally came to an equilibrium point all by itself. That equilibrium could have been precious to a veteran who saw firsthand the destruction of political instability. These two influential thinkers were believers in capitalism because how they understood its forces supported the beliefs they had developed as young men and held onto in adulthood.

Mainstream economists, even "divergent" ones like Keynes and Hayek, often lack the tools to challenge their bias and underlying assumptions, making their theories of limited usefulness. They have a tendency to ignore how the resulting models fail to be positive due to the Western post-Enlightenment cultural context they were living and studying. It has hard to integrate that perspectives with others, thereby complicating the resulting theory, is tough due to the strong desire for simplicity and predictability. A

variety of mental shortcuts, or heuristics, are created by humans to decrease their cognitive load, a large topic of focus within behavioral economics (Kahneman, 2003). Inclusion makes a reliable model much more extremely difficult, incentivizing those who appreciate predictability to push a worldview into it. For example, a political economist familiar with anthropology may argue that if my community is communal, the business owner may derive more value from investing in their cousin's school fees than their firm's future profits. In a society that is individualistic, the firm's future profits may get that investment.

Economics seems to believe that it can predict our turbulent world and its thinkers are just as susceptible to the bias within their models as other scholars who are deemed less powerful. Economics may become more of a historical, sociocultural or anthropological study as opposed to a mathematical or statistical one. This makes the contributions of subfields immensely important towards sounding the alarm for bias. Elements, regardless of their relationship with others in the community, must have their perspectives incorporated for a messier yet more accurate model of the context in which we find ourselves. Without it, a dominant group is susceptible to leading the community away from its full potential.

The issue of faith is one into which I would have loved to delve, however, due to resource constraints, I could not. I implore others who are interested in political violence or preventing the institutional changes or maintenance that could facilitate structural violence to pursue this issue. However, conflict studies focus too much on religiosity when thinking about the role of faith in hardening position. Seeing faith in a broader way could provide for a useful engagement with why groups choose to support hardliners instead of adaptive leaders. Defining spirituality more inclusively could allow for an inquiry into why we hold onto our beliefs and reject unconventional yet viable solutions to conflicts in which we are engaged. A definition I envision is:

A normative set of constantly evolving beliefs, attitudes and behaviors which, when practiced and reflected upon, provide the feedback a community needs to maintain dynamic equilibria with existence. This is through a deep reverence for being a part of something larger and seeking meaning and purpose in relation to it. It includes the

acknowledgement of the small role the community plays in what has been, what is and what will be and the natural forces which dictate such a role.

### *Neoliberalism the product of ideological conflict*

The “paranoid style” becomes dangerous when a more dramatic contextual shift requires the creation of new systems to facilitate collective solutions. Political economists in the classical school also commented on what society should look like and provided what would become the backbone of ideologies such as liberalism and conservatism. One example of this is John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* which sketched a vision of what it meant to be a free and equal society. In the early to mid-1900s, the New Deal Era placed liberalism at the center of US American Political Economy. The systems, the interface between structure (i.e., New Deal policies) and culture, that emerged out of those legislative changes deeply influenced the conceptualization, implementation and evaluation of the organization of collective resources in response to past, present or future issues (Brinkley, 1995). The disagreement over those systems has remained contentious through the right’s desire for freedom and the left’s appreciation for social interventions.

The constant state of re-regulation seems to emerge out of the desires of the side that sees themselves as “losing” which uses that as motivation to stir their voting bloc. A participant who self-identified as an “independent – classic liberal, libertarian, anti-globalist” believes the “other” does not reach across the aisle because their “entire ideology stands on the assumption that people can’t be trusted to think for themselves”, a way of thinking that comes from “statist ideology via public schools, liberal arts professors, the media, and others”; this is how Hofstadter (1964) described the “paranoid style”. Though his writings focused on the extreme right, the extreme left or any other political minority can also embody the “paranoid style”. Neoliberalism as a set of policies pushed by President Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher, supported by Hayek and Friedman and funded by the Koch brothers assumes this group’s power is ultimate and derived from omniscience so they are able to construct a water-tight reality for their followers. Just like the extreme

right, the extreme left is incapable in seeing how their past actions may have influenced the rise and maintenance of neoliberalism.

It is the waging of this conflict that has produced the ecosystem of processes that I understand as neoliberalism. Both sides emerge with, as one participant put it, an “our team at all cost” mentality; they seek to win instead of solve. The lack of dialogue crafts a reality within which the overarching strategy is entrenchment, as opposed to any clear vision of the future. This loose conglomerate of policies results in the validation of both the “over-regulation” narrative on the right and the erosion of critical policies narrative on the left. However, even though both groups make valid claims, they lack the willingness and capacity to engage constructively with the “other”. Neoliberalism, therefore, is the result of poor conflict transformation between ideologies within US American Political Economy, not an integrated policy push by any actor.

Neoliberalism is the nexus of neoclassical and Keynesian economics and rigid political ideologies: it is a Political Economic concept. Neoliberal policies work today because of the Keynesian Political Economy of the early and mid-1900s. Without that particular philosophy towards governance, neoliberalism would not have the systems for its implementation. Strong private property rights and equality seem to open opportunities for the dispossessed masses to climb the socioeconomic ladder. However, it often is to the gain of the political economic elite in the way that the state is in a constant state of reorganization to let markets be free. The result is a set of policies which promote laissez-faire attitudes towards the economy, but do it through political intervention (Cahill and Konings, 2017).

Treating neoliberalism as a distinct economic or political entity results in ignorance of the exploitation of labor and land or the minimization of the role of social identity narratives in interpreting policies (Cahill and Konings, 2017). Neoliberalism survives economically because it is successful as measured by post-Enlightenment empiricism. Economics being an exclusive science prevents the challenging of metrics like Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and unemployment towards broader, deeper measurements such as Gross National Happiness and mis- and dis-employment. Trans-, inter-, multi- and antisciplinary work



has allowed for subfields to emerge within economics, challenging the importance of these hollow metrics' "Truth" and pushing the field of economics towards more context-sensitive, holistic measurements.

Politicians' awareness of the sociocultural undercurrents within the economy and the desire to intervene to maintain them is a Keynesian mindset. However, both sides of the political aisle tend to only want this intervention when it conveniences them. Neoliberalism does not survive politically through the mis- and dis-education of a conservative political base, as liberals tended to argue in both primary and secondary sources in this research. Instead, the way in which political leaders engage social and religious conservatives and the business community defends the values and interests of those voters and popular movements (Cahill and Konings, 2017; Konings, 2015). This conservative voting bloc is satisfied through intervening when the "evil doers" try to undermine freedom (Hofstadter, 1964). Those who are not structural minimalists are marked as liberals simply because they like "big government". Liberals are also pacified by this interventionist mentality when it halts the erosion of social programs promulgated under liberal-leaning governments. Mainstream liberals rarely advocate for socialist programs that improve and expand upon those in other industrialized, liberal democracies: "socialist" still has a long way to go until it is no longer a dirty word.

The line that politicians and other decision makers are forced to walk narrows the potential solution set when faced with an issue. The lack of moderate voices tempering more extreme positions and translating across divides makes it difficult for leaders to constructively engage with stakeholders. Ideological faith of voting blocs elevates perception of defending morality above seeking unconventionally viable alternatives. These two interconnected issues polarize voting blocs and the "paranoid style" of US American politics helps maintain the No Man's Land in the middle. If these issues are addressed, neoliberalism may begin to embody the collaboration between not only neoclassical and Keynesian economics and the dominant political frameworks, but the quitter ways of thinking, feeling and being. These smaller, more complicated perspectives are not simplified, institutionalized and maintained in the way they need to in order to compete with dominant ideologies. However, these perspectives have so much to offer as mediators between the powerful frameworks used within US American Political Economy to make sense of the world.

## *Liberals' sin*

Particular scholars, such as Arthur Okun (1975), have increased their following by discussing the relationship between equality and efficiency. Conservatives were accused of victim-blaming, lacking compassion and acting in contradictory ways to their stated interests. However, the business community within that political coalition is very clear on their appreciation for efficiency and willingness to prioritize it over equality (Phillips-Fein, 2009). If liberals genuinely value freedom and equality they must begin to consider how their community crafts its understanding of challenges and successes across time so they can engage with conservatives. Without a mindfully compassionate perspective, advancing the interests aligned with the liberal values of freedom and equality could prove difficult when interacting with a conservative political bloc that values efficiency.

The struggle to embody freedom and equality became clear in how some participants brought the class struggle into full view in their responses. Definitions of the liberal community were “willing to invest in the welfare of those without resources” or “support economic/ political programs that aim to level the playing field or help to create more equal opportunities for people from different socio-economic backgrounds”. The value behind this was made clear; liberals are “community and individual-oriented” and they believe in “sharing”. Liberals were also described by one participant as either “Broke as hell and in need of social aid, or Elitist and Wealthy”. An individual who self-identified with a lower socioeconomic class stated that they didn’t reach across the aisle towards conservatives “Because one wants to impoverish me and blame me for my own victimization. I can't deal with a belief structure like that.” It seemed as if the liberal community could be divided into those who paid for social programs they believed in and those who received those benefits. Looking at the distribution of participants regarding socioeconomic status, the middle and upper middle class were best represented. However, looking at the responses of those that self-identified with lower socioeconomic classes, the middle may have aligned itself with the upper classes.

Liberal political economists seem to have difficulty holding onto freedom and equality as values and they struggle to advocate for allocation resources according to broader, deeper needs. In theory, scarce goods and services are privatized and commodified in order to reduce usage or extraction, preventing what is known as the Tragedy of the Commons.<sup>1</sup> However, in practice, this encourages only those that associate a high value (through their willingness to pay a high price) to buy them, making it easier for a rich person who mildly appreciates something to acquire it than a poor person who would move heaven and earth. Fred Hirsch (1976) defines “positional goods” as finite resources or items that denote a particular rung of the socioeconomic hierarchy. Due to the nature of US American beliefs that anyone can climb the socioeconomic ladder if they work hard and spend and save their earnings wisely, the existence of positional goods and services can create a “false sense of hope of what economic growth means for the individual” (Hirsch, 1976). Therefore, even if someone is not getting their needs met, they may hold onto the institutions facilitating the creation of those same goods and services they don’t have access to now so that when they are rich, they don’t constrain their ability to obtain them. The American Dream has slowly been globalized, best shown by the growing Chinese consumer class. However, this Dream has become something that requires an ever-rising income, pushing it away from middle and working class US Americans.

This belief maintains the truth some hold that economic growth can solve these issues all by itself, instead of promoting more sustainable, inclusive development. Politicians and policy “experts” implore US Americans to listen to their gospel of growth even as climate science makes it clear what particular religion can do. Growth is not a solution to the problem, but a way to kick the can down the road. Instead of listening to Keynes’ advice about saving for a rainy day, US Americans embrace a more laissez-faire attitude. Only when it rains do they come back to Keynes. If we are to have sustainable growth, the United States cannot continue this constant cycle of re- and de-regulation.

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<sup>1</sup> I do not include commentary on the Tragedy of the Commons since there are many incredibly insightful resources on this topic into which the reader can look for more information. Scholarship on how scarcity can motivate particular development paradigms, like privatization, could also be helpful.

This faith in growth allows the ideas of Keynes and Hayek to continue to survive even when they do not continue to provide solutions to modern-day questions. Furthermore, it allows decision makers to adhere to ideology as they see fit. Keynesian interventions into the economy have occurred under conservative governments just as Hayekian thinking has prevailed under liberal ones. It was a Democratic president that stated ended the era of big government and a Republican president that injected trillions of dollars into the economy after the Great Recession (Wapshott, 2011, Presidential Preservation Project, 2018). Though it appears that periods of relative prosperity produce Hayekian thinking and periods of economic contraction encourage intervention, there are also those who oppose this thinking. During periods of calm, there are those that push for more intervention in the economy, such as asking for increased economic inclusion, as witnessed during the Civil Rights, Feminist and other movements after the economic boom years following World War II. After the financial “bailouts” in 2008, conservative political commentators referred to Hayekian thinking (Wapshott, 2011).

Regardless if it is Keynesian or Hayekian theory, the faith in growth as a solution, in and of itself, is unsustainable. The myth of growth may emerge from how US Americans learn about their own history. Research shows that areas that developed to meet the needs of the industrial revolution developed a deep sense of working class identity in England, but also still bear the scars of the structural and cultural violence that were required in order to supply the labor capitalists required in factories (Obschonka et al, 2017). The shiny steel and glass buildings in London do not pay tribute to the individuals that sacrificed for the economy out of which those modern marvels emerged. Similarly, the liberal community, especially environmentalists, have crafted a narrative of coal miners that is very different from the scholars that have done deep research into their story as the miners and their families tell them. “Black lung” disease, extremely low wages and other challenges do not appear within the narratives that describe the people whose contributions fed the nation’s power grid. Instead, the miners themselves are blamed for doing the only work that could support their families (Environmental Media Association, 2017).

The United States does not attempt to acknowledge the sacrifices working class US American made for the economic growth of the nation. Producing for the European armies before the World Wars, and the

US American one after it entered the militarized conflicts, building the nation's infrastructure before and after the World Wars illustrated the human and mechanical power of the United States. The young nation also experienced technological innovation allowing for the mass production steel, the telegraph, electricity, automobiles and other products facilitated an economic boom. This period happened to be dominated by Keynesian thinking and, maybe more importantly, feeling. Those who were in the US American middle class enjoyed drastic increases in their standard of living. However, as other nations industrialized and incorporated those technologies, the US American manufacturing edge evaporated and the median wage stagnated in real dollars (Gordon, 2016).

The rise of neoclassical economics was at the end of this loss of advantage. Debt seemingly became a way for US Americans to borrow out of tough conversations about budgets and how they facilitate the embodiment of our values and interests. Entrenchment into the golden age of US American capitalism became an impediment to discussing the wealth inequality that had emerged from the laissez-faire economic policies (Stiglitz, 2013). Though research regarding "elite capture" has grappled with how this issue might be happening, it can do better to take a more compassionately mindful position by pointing out a lack of representativeness in US American Political Economy.

Allowing for money and wealth to be a topic of discussion could be a way to address other entrenched conflicts. "Money" appeared 17 times in the open-ended survey questions, highlighting a major topic for not only disagreement between liberals and conservatives, but in the liberal "camp" as well. This is where Thomas Picketty, Joseph Stiglitz and other economists have made names for themselves. The discussion of inequality seems to be an undertone of comments in the survey. This mirrors how jobs, unemployment and other terms connected to livelihoods dominate US American Political Economic discourse. One study argues that many US Americans are "financial fragile" since 47% of US Americans are not able to meet a \$400 emergency without borrowing or selling something (PBS NewsHour, 2016). A narrative surrounding the lack of financial, political and economic resilience could provide the required avenues for dialogue across deeply drawn battle lines.

## *A revolution towards redefinition*

I encourage Political Economists to start a revolution of purpose: the field must go back to its value-laden roots. I do not mean to advance a revolution to push back against the mainstream to craft a new one. I intend to advance a revolution of process and intention. Political economists must begin to ask fundamental questions regarding the purpose of their field which deepens and broadens its usefulness to society at large. Simon Kuznets was asked by the US Congress to craft what would eventually become Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP), to measure the nation's income. Though it would be seen as the ultimate measure of welfare, Kuznets did not see it that way. "Distinctions must be kept in mind," he said, "between quantity and quality of growth... objectives should be explicit: goals for 'more' growth should specify more growth of what and for what" (Kuznet, 1962). This is a call for these individuals to truly pursue a more perfect understanding of economics and politics.

I am not requiring all political economists to come down from their theory and ivory towers and walk among those who actually practice. Though some political economists are built to be practitioners, it would be unfair to demand them all to be. I am asking those of them who wish to stay in academia to walk the halls of their institutions to learn from those who can aid in their pursuits. Donella Meadows, a systems thinker, seemed to have been one of the few that appreciated Kuznets' worries, stating that we must ask "growth of what, and why, and for whom, and who pays the cost, and how long can it last and what's the cost to the planet, and how much is enough" (Meadows, 1999). Not taking the time to do this results in people that, particularly in its urban areas, "spend money we don't have on things we don't need to make impressions that won't last on people we don't care about." (Jackson, 2010) Instead of embracing its tenants, political economists must see these people as allies in their pursuit to better serve a larger swath of the communities to which they belong.

## Conclusion

My favorite quote I saw during the on-campus phase was from Jerome Bruner in *Acts of Meaning*: “I take open-mindedness to be a willingness to construe knowledge and values from multiple perspectives without loss of commitment to one’s own values. Open-mindedness is the keystone of what we call a democratic culture.” This research, and my efforts to integrate my educations together, was inspired by one key question: how can conflict transformation help make open-mindedness more possible within US American Political Economy? I argue that open-mindedness requires expanded views of what is possible, making it time for us to think about Keynes dreams in more equal proportion to his theories. After all, the United States of America was only a dream. It had to be nurtured and defended by its dreamers. Its founding ideals, such as all men are created equal, are still dreams we pursue, even if they may forever remain out of reach.

Keynes said the purpose of economics was to promote a reality in which individuals could focus on the emotional and spiritual needs, rather than the physiological ones. Keynes essentially argued that economics was a tool to help solve how a society can ensure its citizens can meet their physiological. Then, as this issue began to resolve itself, economics would start evolving to focus on addressing “higher” needs, such as belonging, esteem and self-actualization (Keynes, 1930). His dreams were not out of touch with reality since research has shown that increasing incomes beyond \$80,000 does little to improve our emotional well-being (Kahneman and Deaton, 2010). Western mainstream Political Economics’ goals and tools lag behind the needs of the present and the future. Ensuring meeting physiological needs may be achieved in the future through universal basic income, price stabilization and other policies that have yet to be developed by scholars and practitioners in US American Political Economy.

Few people aren’t worried about the state of politics in the United States. Though the Revolutionary and Civil Wars may be the most notable periods of polarization, present-day US American political discourse has seen notable outbursts of political violence. The space from which ideas about how the nation allocates its resources in alignment with its collective values and interests is, itself, mired with destructive violence. However, it remains the space in which citizens articulate, conceptualize, implement and alter the

social reality within which they aspire to live. This subset of our lives houses our hopes and fears and the social dynamics that connect them into nested webs, building out of collective dreams of the society we aspire to call home. The Democratic and Republican Parties are struggling to produce unconventionally viable solutions to advance the values and interests of the US American liberal community. The Parties must begin to facilitate conflict transformation among members and between citizens not only to ensure their survival, but also that of the values and interests they represent.

The ways forward for communities to craft an inclusive, holistic economic model through conflict transformation are about changing this posture. The divide between those that see an inclusive, holistic and embedded political economy as the way to meet the needs of the majority and those who embrace positive, universal neoliberalism is wide. However, it is tightly-held perceptions that maintain this chasm and unconventionally viable solutions can still emerge so long as constructive engagement exists. They must begin to practice conflict transformation as a way to heal overused muscles and strengthen underused ones so liberals can endure the tests of constructive engagement. It is this process that will develop the tools, allowing them to highlight complexity within narratives and common ground between groups.

I believe this requires community members to stop consuming a diet of information which almost exclusively supports their own worldviews through the channels with which they are most familiar. This also requires institutions to maintain systems of culturally-relevant rituals to check the bias of the community they support. Without citizens being able to get and then stay longer outside of comfort zones, the common ground from which to craft inclusive, holistic and culturally-sensitive allocations of resources will be less visible, making it more frustrating to reach.

If liberals are going to continue to advance freedom and equality, the political economy they theorize and practice must advance a more integrated existence through nurturing other modalities of knowing back to health so that they may advance other truths. Ideology, therefore, becomes the interface between what a community believes and what it does. Ideology becomes a process that facilitates evolution and adaption to promote both progress and predictability. Progress to evolve in alignment with a changing context and adaptation of our attitudes to remain at peace within the context as it shifts.

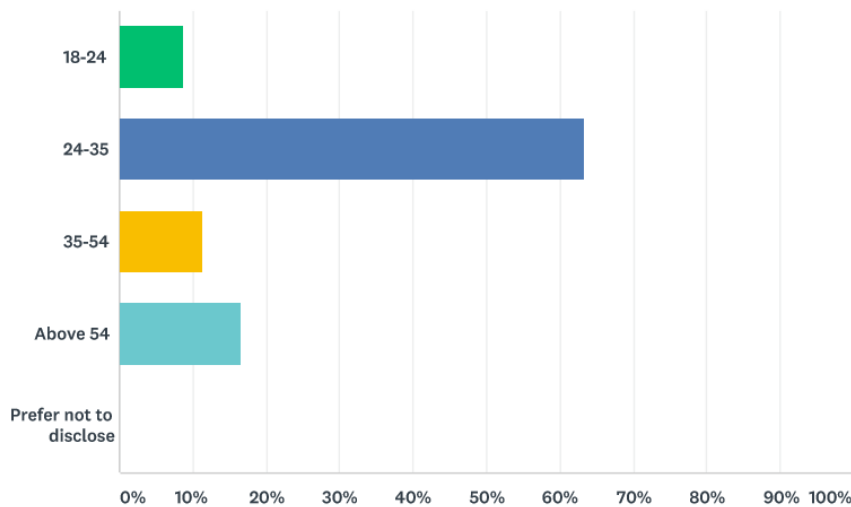


Due to the emotional tie to our ideology, a shifting context often encourages groups to entrench and deny the causes of issues that arise from failing to adapt. This inability to make the leap of faith into a new yet deeply continuous sense of self narrows the set of solutions that shift a community and its resources towards healing from the past and preparing for the future. To counter this, liberals and conservatives must engage in adaptive leadership in order to prepare themselves for the approaching future. This shift in leadership paradigm could increase inclusion, providing a more holistic, complex manner in how shared cultures and structures and, ultimately the shared past, are remembered. Identifying as complex conglomerates could facilitate less drastic and more frequent bottom-up and middle-out changes to culture, structures and the collective storage of the past.

## Appendix

### Q1 Which age group do you belong to?

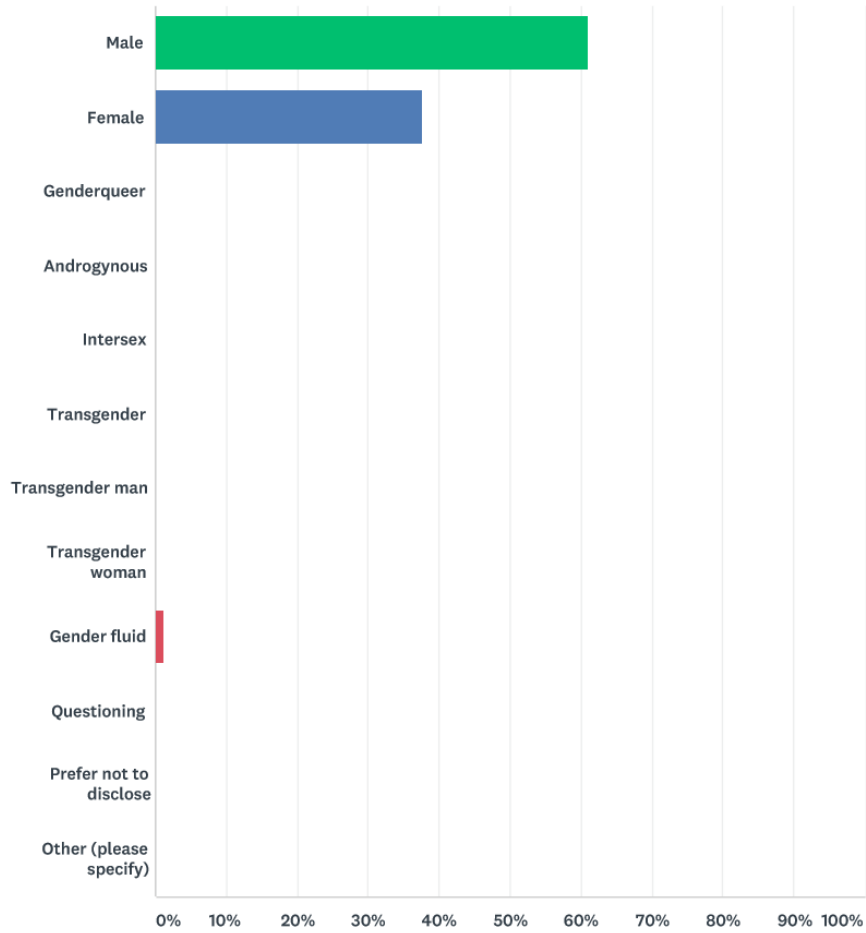
Answered: 79 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
18-24	8.86%	7
24-35	63.29%	50
35-54	11.39%	9
Above 54	16.46%	13
Prefer not to disclose	0.00%	0

## Q2 What is your gender?

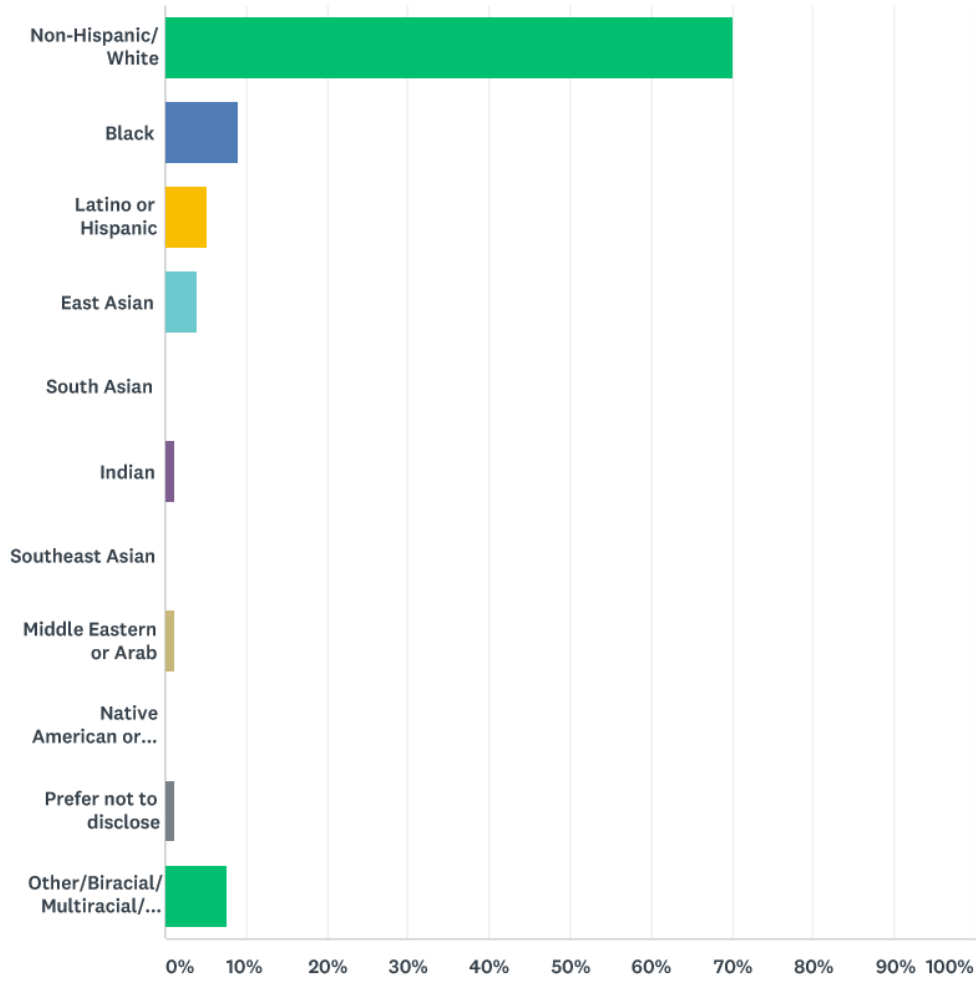
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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	61.04%	47
Female	37.66%	29
Genderqueer	0.00%	0
Androgynous	0.00%	0
Intersex	0.00%	0
Transgender	0.00%	0
Transgender man	0.00%	0
Transgender woman	0.00%	0
Gender fluid	1.30%	1
Questioning	0.00%	0
Prefer not to disclose	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>77</b>

### Q3 Which ethnic group do you belong to?

Answered: 77 Skipped: 2

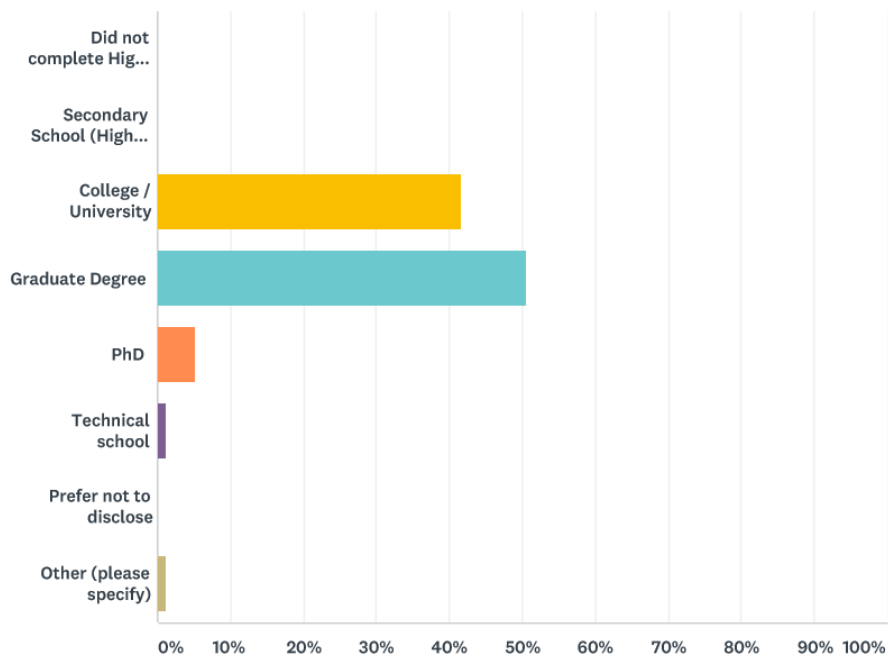


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Non-Hispanic/ White	70.13%	54
Black	9.09%	7
Latino or Hispanic	5.19%	4
East Asian	3.90%	3
South Asian	0.00%	0
Indian	1.30%	1
Southeast Asian	0.00%	0
Middle Eastern or Arab	1.30%	1
Native American or Alaskan native	0.00%	0
Prefer not to disclose	1.30%	1
Other/Biracial/Multiracial/Please Specify	7.79%	6
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>77</b>

Ethnicity	Frequency
Biracial	1
Black and White	3
Asian and White	1
Latina and Asian	1

### Q4 What is your highest level of education?

Answered: 77 Skipped: 2

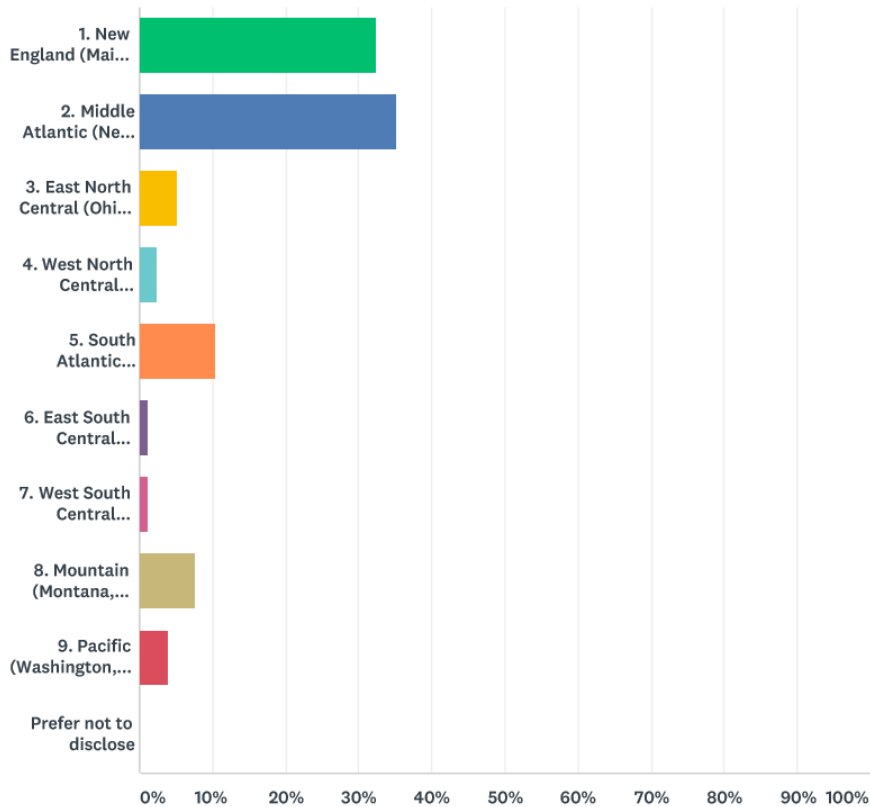


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Did not complete High School	0.00%	0
Secondary School (High School)/GED	0.00%	0
College / University	41.56%	32
Graduate Degree	50.65%	39
PhD	5.19%	4
Technical school	1.30%	1
Prefer not to disclose	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	1.30%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>77</b>

Education	Frequency
Medical School	1

## Q6 Which region of the United States are you from?

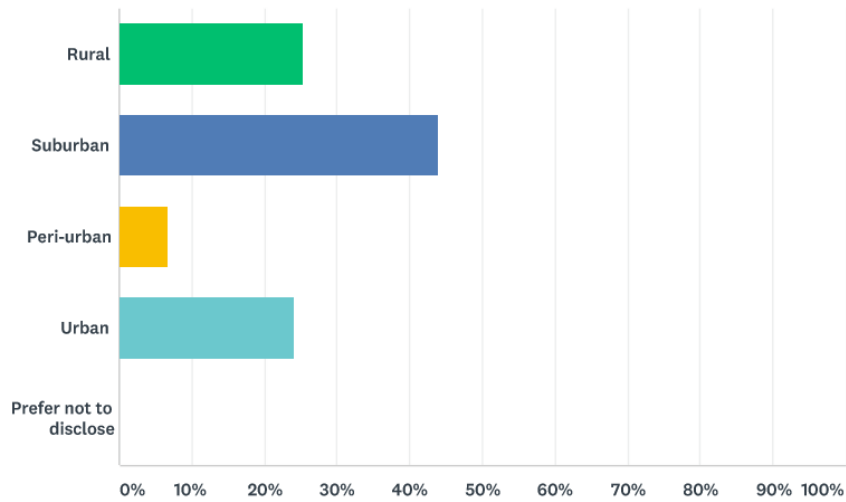
Answered: 77 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1. New England (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut)	32.47%	25
2. Middle Atlantic (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania)	35.06%	27
3. East North Central (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin)	5.19%	4
4. West North Central (Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas)	2.60%	2
5. South Atlantic (Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida)	10.39%	8
6. East South Central (Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi)	1.30%	1
7. West South Central (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas)	1.30%	1
8. Mountain (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada)	7.79%	6
9. Pacific (Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, Hawaii)	3.90%	3
Prefer not to disclose	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>77</b>

## Q7 How would you describe the place in which you lived?

Answered: 75 Skipped: 4

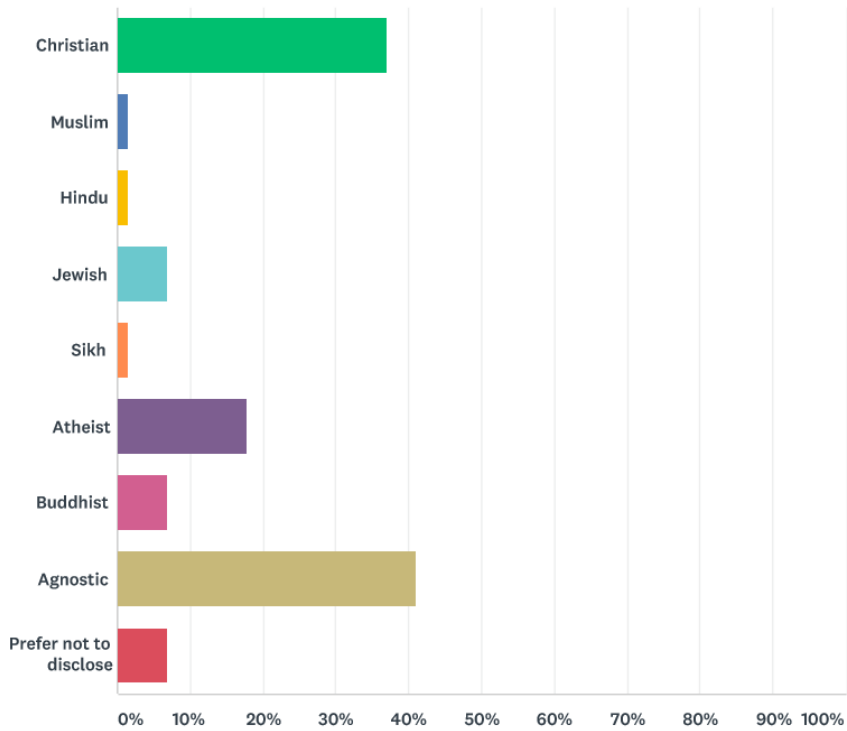


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Rural	25.33%	19
Suburban	44.00%	33
Peri-urban	6.67%	5
Urban	24.00%	18
Prefer not to disclose	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>75</b>

Other Places	Frequency
Island	1
College Town	1

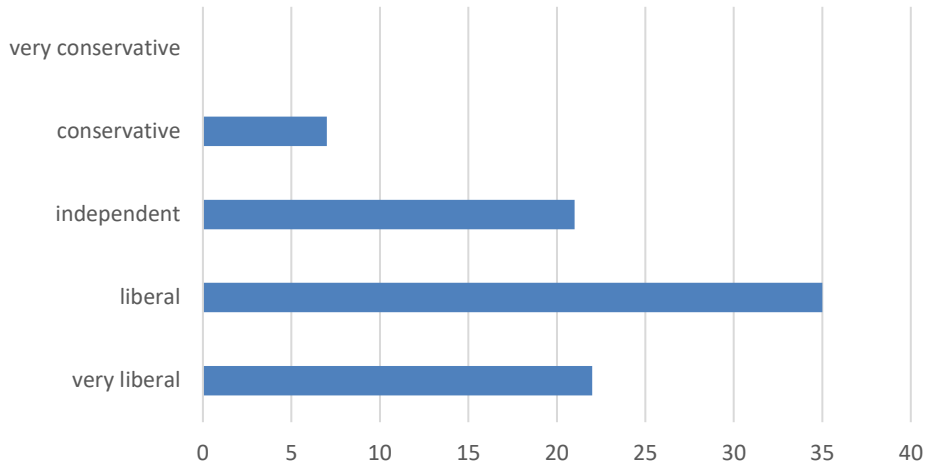
## Q9 How do you associate spiritually?

Answered: 73 Skipped: 6

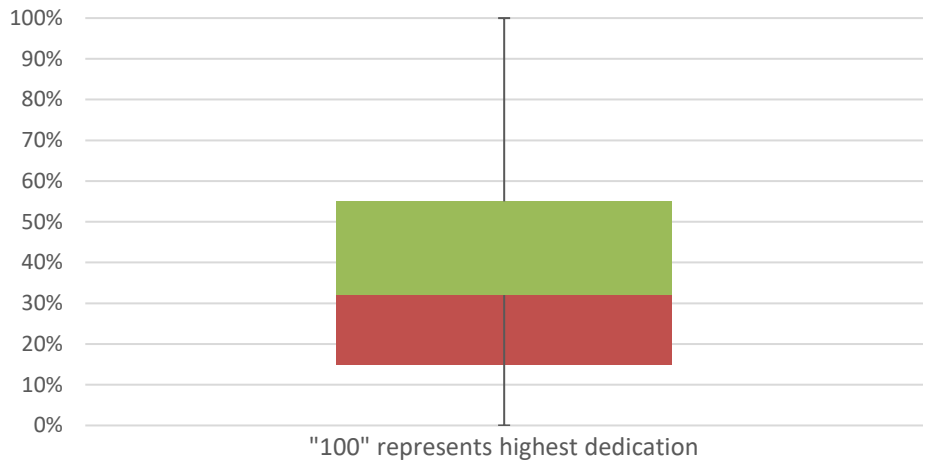


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Christian	36.99% 27
Muslim	1.37% 1
Hindu	1.37% 1
Jewish	6.85% 5
Sikh	1.37% 1
Atheist	17.81% 13
Buddhist	6.85% 5
Agnostic	41.10% 30
Prefer not to disclose	6.85% 5
Total Respondents: 73	

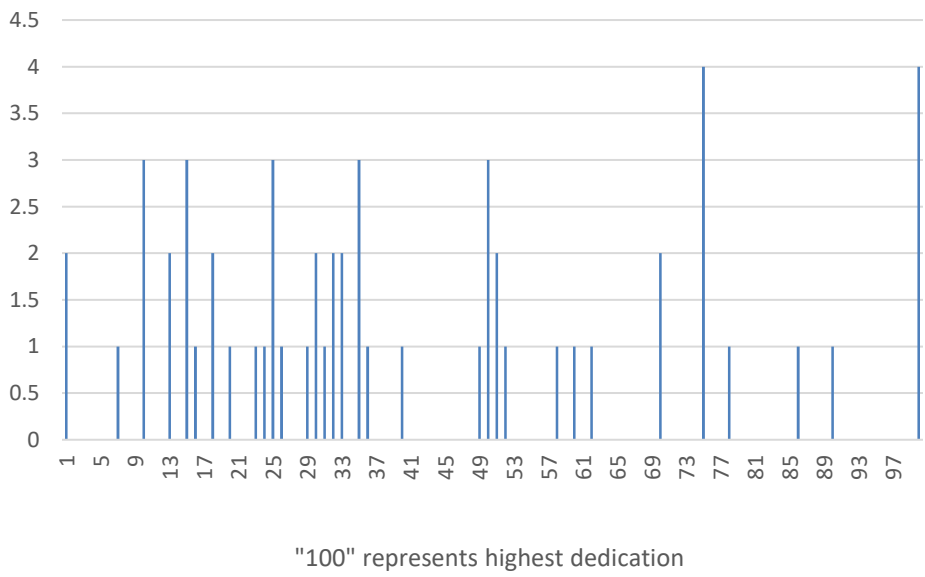
### Political Distribution



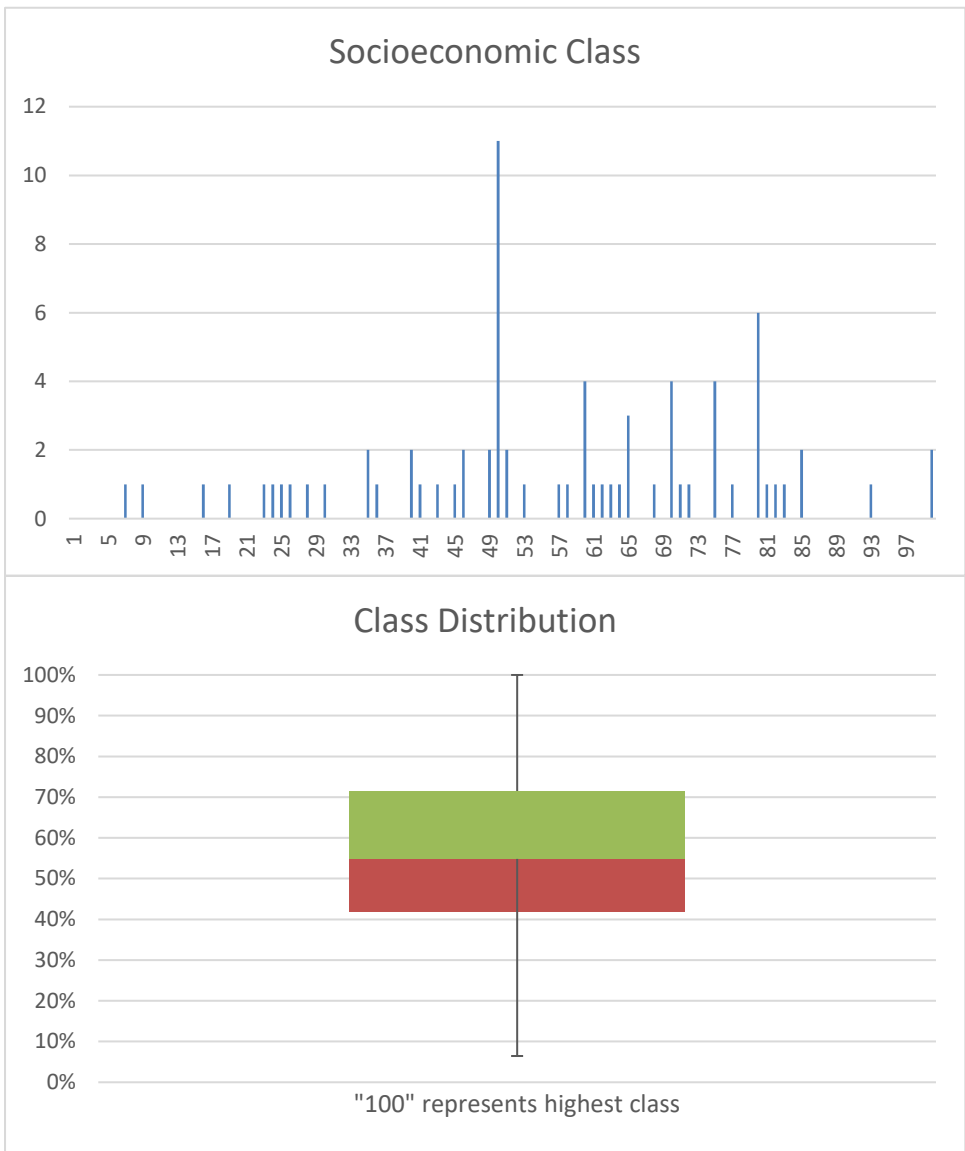
### Faith Dedication



### Faith Dedication







The following word clouds are from all of the open-ended questions (questions 11 through 16). The ranking of words was crafted with SurveyMonkey’s algorithm. Due to how closely frequency and ranking seemed to line up, the affect upon the importance of words within the word clouds was assumed to not be sufficient for omitting them. The table contains words that were used often among all open-ended responses:

<b>Key Words</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<i>Government</i>	32
<i>Social, Community or Safety Net</i>	32
<i>Believe or Belief</i>	14
<i>Money</i>	17
<i>Taxes or Low Taxes</i>	12

Q11 When it comes to the economy, what about someone makes you define them as liberal?

Money Progressive Economy Corporations Liberal Belief  
Taxes Willing Social Community  
Government Equality Economic Spending

Q12 When it comes to the economy, what makes someone a moderate in your eyes?

Economy Middle CLASS Economic Consider  
Moderate Policy Taxes Group  
Government Unsure Support Market

Q13 When it comes to the economy, what about someone makes you define them as conservative?

Markets Industry Belief Dislike Believe Security  
Economy Safety Net Government Society  
Social Financial Decisions Money Means Low Taxes  
America

Q14 When to the economy, is there a difference between a “liberal” and a “progressive”?  
Please explain.

Government Needs Conservative Terms Believe  
Social Think Policy Economic Guess  
Economy Associate Likely

Q15 When it comes to the economy, why do you not “reach across the aisle”?

Issues Socioeconomic Think Individuals  
Reach across the Aisle Understand  
Economic Serves Conservative Vote  
Compromise Belief

Q16 When it comes to the economy, why don't they?

Fear Politics Economic Business Think Question  
Money Loss Liberals Aisle

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