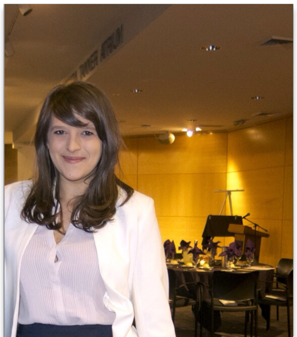

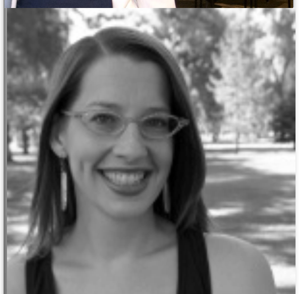

DISRUPTIVE POWER: A COMPARISON OF POLITICAL VOICE FOR NON-ELITES AFTER THE GREAT DEPRESSION & THE RECESSION OF 2008

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This thesis investigates how non-elites influence policymaking in a time of large income and wealth inequality. To do this, I examine the tactics of disruptive power used by two groups following two major economic downturns in the U.S.: the industrial workers after the Great Depression in the 1930s and Occupy Wall Street after the Recession in 2008. I pay special attention to the specific leverage each group was able to generate through practices of noncooperation. I find that the strikes of industrial workers who withdrew their labor in large numbers in the 1930s led to significant policy change, specifically the National Relations Labor Act of 1935 (also known as the Wagner Act), which was one of the most influential laws in shaping workers' political future. The passage of the Wagner Act gave workers and unions the political power to continue to put pressure on policy makers, which contributed to more equitable policies such as the Fair Labor Standards Act. In contrast, Occupy Wall Street resulted in very little policy change. I argue that the lack of policy results was due in part to Occupy's failure to withdraw contributions from systems of interdependence. This prevented them from acquiring a significant form of leverage vis-à-vis government or financial elites. Occupy Wall Street did succeed in sparking a national dialogue, putting economic inequality on the agenda, but it was unable to produce the kind of robust disruptive power that can prompt policy change. My method involved careful analysis of social movement theory, particularly as it related to the concept of disruptive power and the close study of scholarship from political science, history, and sociology, which addressed the two cases in their respective contexts.