Challenging Social Class In American Political Discourse

Bernie Sanders, Occupy Wall Street, and the New Discourse of Inequality

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Master's Thesis at ILOS/HF

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

18.05.2016

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2016

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Abstract

Foreword

I would like to thank everyone who in some way helped me finish this thesis, whether it was by inspiring me academically, supporting me emotionally, or reading through endless chaotic pages to help me make sense of it. You know who you are. I could not have completed this without you.

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1 Introduction

I think most Americans understand that our country today faces a series of unprecedented crises. The middle class in this country for the last 40 years has been disappearing. Millions of Americans are working longer hours for lower wages. And yet almost all of the new income and wealth being created is going to the top 1 %. As a result of this disastrous Citizens United Supreme Court decision, our campaign finance system is corrupt and is undermining American democracy. Millionaires and billionaires are pouring unbelievable sums of money into the political process in order to fund super-PACs and to elect candidates who represent their interests, not the interests of working people. (Bernie Sanders, 2015)

Given that political and governmental processes are substantively linguistic processes, there is a clear general rationale for using the resources of language and discourse analysis in researching politics and government. (Fairclough 2013, 171)

1.1 Background and Research Questions

Writing in 2001, Sherry Linkon and John Russo argued that there is "class confusion" in the United States: Americans often (falsely) believe that they live in a classless system, that is, that there is no such thing as social class in America. The other "confusion" is that there is a class system in the United States, but that most people belong to the middle class.[1] The many myths existing about class, combined with more recent challenges to the dominant class discourse in the United States, makes it a compelling and relevant topic to research. Interestingly, the new way of thinking and talking about social class that has developed since Occupy Wall Street has made its way to the very top and centre of American politics: Presidential elections.

James Thomas Zebroski has argued that the hegemonic discourse of social class that has prevailed in the United States since the early 1980s, viewing class position as the sum of individual choices, makes it possible "to think of class in such a way as to put forward a legislative agenda that has, among other things, radically cut taxes for the super-rich while incomes of middle and lower class people decline."[2] However, there have been important changes in social class discourse since Zebroski's article was

[1] Sherry Linkon and John Russo, "Class Confusions: American Media Discourse About Class," *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 46, no. 3 (2001).
[2] James Thomas Zebroski, "Social Class as Discourse: Mapping the Landscape of Class in Rhetoric and Composition," *JAC* 26, no. 3/4 (2006). 525

published in 2006. The 2007-8 financial crisis and following Great Recession has affected the way many Americans think about class. First, many who saw themselves as comfortably middle class have lost their jobs, houses and savings, or seen friends or relatives do the same. The government "bail-outs" for banks and businesses, juxtaposed with the masses of ordinary people who were unemployed, in debt or lost their houses led to a stronger class-consciousness in the United States. The following social movements, slogans and buzzwords (Occupy Wall Street, "We are the 99 %," income inequality etc.) represent a significant challenge to and break with the political and public social class discourse that has dominated in the past few decades.

The 2016 presidential primary elections are interesting when it comes to issues of social class. Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders from Vermont is a self-declared socialist and running on the platform of social reform issues, far more radical than usually seen in contemporary American national politics. On the other hand, celebrity real estate mogul Donald Trump is running in the Republican primaries, calling himself "self-made," and regularly refers to his business acumen as what qualifies him to be president. Another Republican candidate, Carly Fiorina, went from being a secretary to a CEO "in the only country where that's possible."[3] Reiterations of and challenges to traditional American discourse about social class flourish as the candidates try to appeal to both their party and the voters.

The question this thesis attempts to answer is: How does the Bernie Sanders campaign in the 2016 presidential primary election break with and challenge the dominant discourse of social class in the United States? In other words, what is the dominant conceptualization of social class in American political discourse; how does Bernie Sanders talk about it differently; and, finally, what are the larger ideological implications for this change? The following introduction will provide further context to and elaborate on the different aspects of the question, and place my thesis in the broader traditions of American Studies and critical discourse analysis.

1.2 Review of Scholarly Literature

[3] Presidential Candidates Debates, "Republican Candidates Debate in Simi Valley, California," in *The American Presidency Project* (2015).

Recent scholarly contributions to the subject of social class in American studies, and the study of American society and history in general, operate with different and explicitly problematic definitions of and ideas about class. I will begin with an account of the historiographical works on social class in American studies before moving on to those that more specifically deal with social class as discourse. Much of the historiographical works on social class in American Studies have been focused its relation to other similar concepts – those of race, ethnicity and gender. Especially its status from a multiculturalist perspective has been the subject of debate and historiographical studies (1993 special issue), most recently in the June 2015 issue of *Racial and Ethnic Studies*. The following works are not an exhaustive overview of everything written about the topic of class in American history and cultural studies – they are selected because they provide frameworks, methodologies, concepts or distinctions that are relevant and helpful to this paper.

In 1993, in a special issue on multiculturalism in the *American Quarterly*, John Higham criticizes the multiculturalist movement, arguing that the concept of class has been replaced with those of race, ethnicity and gender in the study of American history, culture and society. He distinguishes different forms of inequality, one being discrimination based on race, gender or other identity markers: "commonly understood as, personal, as internal, as part of the very substance of who we are."[4] The other is "the disadvantages of external condition, the burdens of class. Here the distribution of tangible resources – a nexus of property, skill, and political power – constitutes a more generalized structure of inequality."[5] The distinction Higham makes between the two forms of inequality is one between "who we are" and what we have or can achieve.[6] According to Higham, the different forms of inequality and privilege in a society affect and reinforce each other. However, in American Studies, the turn to multiculturalism has "displaced class analysis,"[7] in effect standing in the way of uncovering ways in which class inequality functions in American society.

[4] John Higham, "Multiculturalism and Universalism: A History and Critique," *American Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (1993). 195-196
[5] Ibid. 196
[6] Ibid. 195-196
[7] Larry J. Griffin and Maria Tempenis, "Class, Multiculturalism and the American Quarterly," ibid.54, no. 1 (2002). 68

In the same special issue, multiculturalist and gender scholars defend their positions. Nancy A. Hewitt responds to Higham's criticism from a multiculturalist and feminist perspective. While she is "sympathetic to Higham's plea to recognize the submerged culture of class in America,"[8] Hewitt criticizes the tendency of white, male academics to insist on the primacy of class as an analytic category. She writes that Higham is unwilling to understand the complexity of multiculturalist and feminist scholarship, and that these new trends allow for the study of overlapping multiple identities – class being one of many structural inequalities multiculturalism is able to address analytically. In other words, according to Hewitt, the multiculturalist turn does not discard class analysis, but rather opens up for a more nuanced analysis of American inequality.

In 2002, Higham's theory again becomes the focus of the *American Quarterly*, when Larry J. Griffin and Maria Tempenis decide to attempt to answer the question of whether class analysis in fact has been displaced by multiculturalism in American Studies. They perform a quantitative study of *American Quarterly* content since its establishment in 1949, and find that the concept or framework of American exceptionalism is in fact what traditionally has stood in the way of class analysis in American studies, not multiculturalism.[9] They also find that social class has been relatively absent from the majority of work in the *AQ* throughout its history regardless of dominant framework.

In the second chapter of *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, Dutch historian Chris Lorenz argues that class, as well as ethnicity, race, gender and religion, are concepts of identity. The concepts have a dual function: they are both "analytic categories" and "categories of practice." The first means that historians and social scientists use them for research purposes, and the latter means that nonprofessionals use them to identify themselves in relation to others in social and political relations use them.[10] This distinction further delineates my project, as it is most interested in social class as a category of practice. This thesis relates the

[8]Nancy A. Hewitt, "A Response to John Higham," ibid.45, no. 2 (1993). 239

[9] Larry J. Griffin and Maria Tempenis, "Class, Multiculturalism and the American Quarterly," ibid.54, no. 1 (2002).

[10] Chris Lorenz, "Representations of Identity: Ethnicity, Race, Class, Gender and Religion. An Introduction to Conceptual History," in *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, ed. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). 30-31.

Bernie Sanders campaign to class-consciousness – how people self-identify within the system of social stratification – and class action – social and political action based on class membership. In other words, it interprets the campaign as social action based on class membership. To clarify, I am not applying the categories of social class on a population; I am investigating how they self-identify apply ideas of social class to their experiences.

In 2010, the journal of the German Association of American Studies *Amerikastudien / American Studies* came out with a special issue on *Poverty and the Culturalization of Class* which (without addressing him directly) problematizes Lorenz' conceptualization of social class. In their introductory article to the issue, Michael Butter and Carsten Schinko address the criticism raised in Walter Benn Michaels' *The Shape of the Signifier* (2004) and *The Trouble with Diversity* (2006) of the New American Studies' (amongst others) conceptualization of class as identity, similar to the way we conceptualize race and gender. Michaels argues that viewing class as identity stands in the way of intellectually and politically addressing poverty because it views class differences as diversity rather than inequality. Carsten and Schinko write, "Recognizing all classes as equal makes sense in so far as one should of course not look down on people because they are poor, nor hold them in higher esteem just because they are rich."[11] They suggest that applying the term poverty rather than class emphasizes how class functions differently from the identity concepts race, ethnicity and gender, as it makes clearer that it is "a problem that needs to be tackled," not simply difference.[12]

Several scholars have recently argued that class is becoming an increasingly relevant framework through which to understand inequality in America. In a special issue of the journal *Racial and Ethnic Studies* from June 2015, a group of scholars make "a reassessment of the current relevance of *The Declining Significance of Race [DSR]*," a 1980 monograph by William Julius Wilson on the relative importance of race vs class in understanding American life. In the original book, Wilson argued that class was becoming increasingly important in America because of the increasing class differences amongst African Americans. Several of the articles in the symposium argue that Wilson's thesis is even more relevant today than it was when the book came out in

[11] Michael Butter and Carsten Schinko, "Poverty and the Culturalization of Class," *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 55, no. 1 (2010). 5.
[12] Ibid. Page 16.

1980. Karyn Lacy argues that class privilege is becoming more important than white privilege in getting ahead, and that *DSR* is even more relevant today than it was 35 years ago, due to "a class divide larger today than at any time since 1928."[13] Jennifer Hochchild and Vesla Weaver conclude that: "Wilson's diagnosis of the declining significance of race in the social and economic arenas is even more persuasive now than in 1980."[14]

Some of them point out who is left out of a purely racially informed analysis. In their contribution to the issue, "*The Declining Significance of Race* in the twenty-first century: a retrospective assessment in the context of rising class inequality," Arthur Sakamento and Shannon Xuanren Wang write about poor whites and how "theories emphasizing 'white privilege' and the 'critical race perspective' [imply] that poor white people are especially incompetent."[15] Without the added understanding of how class privilege affects their opportunity for social mobility, it gives the impression that poor whites are poor despite their privileged status, in other words, they are poor by their own fault. Focusing on class also opens up for understanding the experience of poor black people better. None of these articles, or Wilson's book, is trying to argue that the concept of race is not important to the understanding of inequality in America, or that white privilege does not exist. They are simply showing how it can be detrimental to that understanding to focus only on racial privilege or to ignore class privilege as a real factor.

The appearance of a special issue of a journal of race and ethnicity studies that focuses on class, or admittedly race and ethnicity's relationship with class, exemplifies the increasing focus on social class in the United States today. The contributors to the issue seem to recommit themselves to a study of inequality in America that includes social class – as Nancy Hewitt emphasized in her defense of multiculturalism in the 1993 Higham debate. While I agree with all of the above that the study of American inequality is well served with a multidimensional focus that includes both race/ethnicity and class, I have chosen to exclude the former from this thesis. Part of the reason for

[13] Karyn Lacy, "Race, Privilege and the Growing Class Divide," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 8 (2015).
[14] Jennifer Hochschild and Vesla Weaver, "Is the Significance of Race Declining in the Political Arena? Yes, and No," ibid.
[15] Arthur Sakamoto and Sharron Xuanren Wang, "The Declining Significance of Race in the Twenty-First Century: A Retrospective Assessment in the Context of Rising Class Inequality," ibid.

that is that the focus of my primary sources is mainly on economic inequality, and part of it is that I am applying a form of discursive class analysis that is more interested in the growth of class-consciousness than other kinds of tensions. As argued by Higham, and Butter and Schinko, viewing class as a separate category allows for different insights than a framework that treats it as one form of inequality among others. However, the growth of the left in American politics in recent years has also had a major element of fighting for racial justice represented by the Black Lives Matter movement, and the general social justice movement, which has more to do with identity acceptance (gender and LGBTQ rights, ethnicity etc.). A study of the American left that includes all of the above elements could be an interesting topic for another paper with a different theoretical framework.

The next thematic bulk of my review of scholarly literature involves works that specifically deal with social class as discourse. They include works on social class ideas in American public discourse, providing insights into earlier versions of the inequality discourse I identify in this thesis. I have also included Norman Fairclough's "manifesto" for contemporary critical discourse analysis in this section – in other words, what he believes critical discourse analysis should be focusing on.

Sherry Linkon and John Russo's 2001 article "Class Confusions: American Media Discourse about Class" (appearing in the American Studies journal *Amerikastudien /American Studies*) is an analysis of American news media's class discourse since 1990 in an effort to "understand more clearly current ideas about class identity and class conflict." They argue that there is "class confusion" in the United States, with the notion that most Americans are middle class as the powerful hegemonic idea at the center of that confusion since the 1950s: "This belief has obstructed serious discussion about how class affects American society, and it has forestalled any serious effort to organize class-based coalitions for social change." (367) However, they also write that ideas about social class are changing in the United States in the 1990s due to (amongst others) processes of globalization and technological innovation.

Linkon and Russo researched US news media, "reviewing dozens of magazine articles, broadcast news reports, and entertainment programs,"[16] and were able to

[16] Linkon and Russo, "Class Confusions: American Media Discourse About Class."

identify four different trends in American class discourse in the 90s. First, people are using new terms and models of class (one article, for example, presented a new age based class divide in America). Second, the idea of class as "collective identity and social conflict" has reappeared, but the focus is on the elite rather than the working class. Third, "class is increasingly viewed as simultaneously oppositional and individualistic, a source of collective identity and action as well as a matter of individual effort and will."[17] Finally, there has been a shift in focus from class issues to workplace issues, further blurring the distinction between working class and middle class as they both can share similar work experiences. This web of discursive patterns is presented in the article as chaotic and confused. None of them had yet formed anything coherent enough to fully challenge the dominant discourse. However, some of the discursive trends identified by Linkon and Russo are early foundations of the discursive shift presented in this paper. Especially the idea of the "overclass" and the distinction between individualistic and oppositional views of class are helpful conceptualizations for a discursive analysis of social class in the Bernie Sanders campaign, and especially its ties to Occupy Wall Street.

Writing in 2006, James Thomas Zebroski conducts a discourse analysis of social class discourse in American news media around the time of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. He argues that Hurricane Katrina caused a break in the "hegemonic discourse of social class that had ruled at least since Ronald Reagan's election in 1980." The suffering of the poor caused the news media to focus on social class issues and the government's role and responsibility in handling it. This brief challenge to the dominant discourse ended after only a few weeks, due to successful attempts from conservative media to turn the focus back to individual responsibility: "the formerly prevalent discourse of social class has returned once again, though in a far weaker form than any time since its installation."[18] The discourse Zebroski defines as hegemonic is what I call individualistic, and which I will further expand on in chapter 2.

In her response to Zebroski in the same journal issue, Nancy Mack discusses definitions of working class, writing that any definition "seldom satisfies" because most definitions of the working class involves values that they are assumed not to have – "a

[17] Ibid.
[18] Zebroski, "Social Class as Discourse: Mapping the Landscape of Class in Rhetoric and Composition."

lack of wealth, resources, morals, intelligence, credentials, health, manners, taste, and so on."[19] What she puts her finger on is a cultural definition of the working class, and illustrates the judgements passed on lower classes when working from the belief of living in a meritocratic society. Furthermore, in discussing a law that bans controversial discourse from classrooms, she illustrates another aspect of the individualistic discourse, which is its strategies of maintaining itself: "the discourse of resentment becomes the issue versus the material conditions of the shrinking middle class and the growing working poor."[20] Critical arguments are emotionalized, and "re-presented as the 'politics of envy,' 'class warfare,' and 'political correctness' and is displaced onto other marginalized groups."[21] Such definitions and strategies "reveal more about the namer than the named" according to Mack, and I agree with her, and will in the next few chapters argue that a new discourse has appeared which to some degree works around the issue of being emotionalized, as it turns the class warfare argument back around on the "namers."

In his "General Introduction" to the 2013 second edition of *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, British linguist and founder of critical discourse analysis Norman Fairclough outlines a manifesto for critical discourse analysis. This is in response to what he calls the crisis of neoliberal capitalism – in other words, the financial crisis of 2007-8 caused by our contemporary form of capitalism that is based on neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is, in short, an ideology and political project that believes in the primacy of the free market, and sees it as the proper role of government to ensure the free market. I will explain this in more detail in chapter 2. While critical discourse analysis has generally occupied itself with analyzing the structures of modern society that are formed in part by a neoliberal agenda, Fairclough calls for works that analyze strategies. By "strategies," Fairclough means "attempts, in the context of the failure of existing structures, to transform them in particular directions."[22] In other words, Fairclough is calling for researchers to apply discourse analysis to study responses to the crisis.

[19] Nancy Mack, "Being the Namer or the Named: Working-Class Discourse Conflicts," ibid.21, no. 1/2 (2007). Page 333.
[20] Ibid. Page 335.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, 2nd edition ed. (London: Routledge, 2010). Page 14.

While Fairclough has worked in a British or international perspective, I would like to apply critical discourse analysis and its current manifesto to an American experience. What I call the individualistic, traditional, or dominant discourse in later chapters should be understood as an aspect of the tradition of neoliberal capitalism. In the United States, president Ronald Reagan's first inaugural address in considered a founding document and a cornerstone in the individualistic ideology and view of government that has been dominant (even hegemonic) in the United States for the past almost four decades – what I consider to be neoliberal capitalism in the American context. The Bernie Sanders campaign represents a strategy, in Fairclough's terms, to transform society in the direction of dealing with the problems caused by neoliberalism.

This paper is an attempt to articulate what is happening in the United States – the recent rise of class consciousness (exemplified by the Occupy Wall Street movement and the Bernie Sanders campaign) in response to the 2008 Financial crisis and increasing inequality – as one strategy in response to what Fairclough calls the crisis of neoliberal capitalism. Linkon and Russo, and Zebroski both identify challenges to the individualistic discourse that was dominant in the period. Their articles were published before the financial crisis of 2007-8. The challenges they identify were both developments and events that led to the inequality discourse we see today.

1.3 Primary Sources

The focus of this paper is on looking into the discursive strategies of Bernie Sanders' campaign to become the Democratic presidential candidate for the 2016 election. The main primary sources will therefore be from his campaign, such as his website, social media accounts, speeches and statements, as well as the televised debates with the other candidates. Video of speeches and televised debates are accessible on YouTube. Transcripts of all primary debates, and several campaign speeches, statements and press releases are accessible from *The American Presidency Project*. Video sources that are not transcribed on their website are included in the appendix. The reason for the primary focus on Bernie Sanders specifically come partially from initial research indicating that he is the main bearer of the new discourse that stemmed from the Occupy movement. He entered the election with a very distinct way of talking about social class issues that caught my attention and initially inspired

this approach. Furthermore, Sanders' connection with the Democratic Party is precarious, as he throughout his political career has identified as an Independent and only officially aligned himself with the Democrats in order to gain their nomination for president.

The polarized nature of American political discourse makes the primary election a particularly interesting and informative source of knowledge about American political class discourse. While the candidates make sure to show their ability to go up against the other party's future candidate by criticizing them, the main goal of the primary debates is defeating other candidates from their own party. We are invited to see deeper ideological and political nuances and conflict lines. On the other hand, it is important to remember that much of what the candidates say is what they believe the voters want to hear. It says something about the current political climate among voters, and we can further see the popularity of the different stances in polls and election results.

I have chosen to focus on three speeches from different points of time in the campaign that appear to be central to Bernie Sanders' message, and that focus specifically on issues related to social class. His "Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in Burlington, Vermont" on May 26, 2015 is an important speech because it officially launched his candidacy and so he outlines his major arguments, focus and policies. In other words, a close look at that speech will give insight into what he considers the major issues facing America, what should be the focus of the campaign, and which approaches are necessary to address the issues. Because it is the launch of his own campaign, we can also assume that he (or his speechwriters – who wrote it is not the issue, I am more interested in the fact that he performs it) was free to decide his talking points and time.

In a speech at Georgetown University on 19 November 2015, Sanders explained in detail what he means when he calls himself a "democratic socialist." Here, he makes explicit his ties with President Roosevelt and the New Deal, and gets deeper into his ideological point of view. Central issues of the Bernie Sanders campaign are "taking on" Wall Street – that is to reintroduce heavy government regulation of big banks (even breaking them up if they are "too big"); and campaign finance reform in order to create a system of electing politicians who are independent of the interests of the corporate and financial sectors. In his January 5, 2016 speech in New York, "Remarks on Wall Street

and the Economy in New York City," he outlines his plan for Wall Street reform and, even more interestingly, explains all that is wrong with their current model. This speech took place less than a month before the first caucus in Iowa on 1 February. The Georgetown and New York speeches, respectively, provide points of comparison with the New Deal era and Occupy Wall Street movement.

A central argument of this thesis is that the 2008 Financial Crisis, Great Recession and following Occupy Wall Street movement contributed to the formation of a new discourse of inequality in American political class discourse. Chapter 3 explains the discursive and non-discursive connections between Occupy Wall Street and the Bernie Sanders campaign. Primary sources to establish this connection include posts by and for the "99 Percent Project" on the blogging platform Tumblr.com, documents published by the Occupy Wall Street movement, posts by the Facebook page "Occupy Wall Street," and newspaper and magazine articles reporting on and commenting the relationship. The latter will also highlight the perception of the connection between the movement and the campaign.

While Chapter 3 contextualizes the Sanders campaign in its contemporary setting, Chapter 4 places it in historical context by investigating its connections with the political left in American history, particularly with president Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal in the 1930s. For this, I have included speeches by Roosevelt related to his plans to rehabilitate the American economy during the Great Depression

My paper will also include data from several of Sanders' other speeches, some campaign videos, excerpts from the Bernie 2016 campaign website, and the Democratic debates when relevant. I have included a transcript of the speech at Georgetown University in the appendix. Also in the appendix are marked up collections of every instance of "1 percent" and "billionaire" across the 16 of Sanders' speeches that I have worked with. In addition to clear-cut election documents, primary sources include newspaper articles, commentaries and broadcasts (American/English speaking and Norwegian). These sources say something about reception, how the candidates come across, in addition to casting light on the pattern of production and consumption of the discourse.

1.4 Theory

The most central concept to this paper is social class. Social class refers to the grouping of people in a hierarchy based on their social and economic status. While many systems of social stratification existed in pre-modern Europe, and continue to exist in other parts of the world, this paper limits its definitions to modern European ideas of social class. I will begin by outlining some of the major models of modern class formation, before clarifying my own position, and then moving on to explaining how I will apply discourse analysis as method.

The editors of *Bring Class Back In* describe three different main views on class. Marx relates social class to the production process – dividing society into two main classes: capitalists and the proletariat. The capitalists control production and purchase labor, while the proletariat sell labor but do not own any of the means of production. In the middle, there is a "petite bourgeois," who own enough of the means of production to not have to labor, but do not have enough purchasing power to buy labor from others. In other words, Marx defines class status and relations from a material perspective – only focusing on economic capital. In the Marxist tradition of class, the proletariat will inevitably rise up against its oppressors – Linkon and Russo calls this a broadly oppositional model.[23] The second major tradition of studying class derives from another contributor to the field of sociology, Max Weber. His conceptualization of class is multidimensional – it is "understood as the summation or some weighted combination of a variety of position effects, e.g., property, income, occupation, authority, education, or prestige."[24] Linkon and Russo call the Weberian model individualistic. The final model of social class in McNall, Levine and Fantasia is discursive, referring to studies that "broaden the concept of class consciousness to include language, arguing that it is both through discourse and social practice that individuals are constructed as human subjects."[25]

[23] Linkon and Russo, "Class Confusions: American Media Discourse About Class."
[24] Scott G. McNall, Rhonda F. Levine, and Rick Fantasia, "Introduction," in *Bringing Class Back In: Contemporary & Historical Perspectives*, ed. Scott. G McNall, Rhonda F. Levine, and Rick Fantasia (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991). Page 2.
[25] Ibid. Page 8.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's definition of social class provides further helpful distinctions. He is interested in the power relations of social class, adding social and cultural capital to the category of economic capital to determine class status:

> *capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of a title of nobility.*[26]

In other words, he broadens Marx's definition of social class to include other forms that may be "converted" into economic capital (property or money). Bourdieu's contribution to class theory has been influential to the contemporary understanding of social class – as analytic category it is not very useful to speak only of economic capital for uncovering systems of social stratification ,as influence and power works beyond simple monetary influence. The addition of social and cultural capital makes clearer certain hereditary aspects of class which might be judged as merit based, as education, how we act, and who we know are things that are influenced by family connections as well as gained through a lifetime.

I agree with Linkon and Russo that an "integrative view of class identity as emerging out of the interaction of representations with economic structures, class struggle, and individual experiences seems to us the most useful, complete approach to the problem of studying class."[27] In other words, I am operating with a model of social class that views class formation as a combination of material condition, individual choices and how we talk about it. However, the main focus of my thesis is not the full analysis of class formation, but rather of the development of class consciousness. McNall, Levine and Fantasia define class-consciousness "as a group's awareness and understanding of itself that grows out of opposition to other groups."[28] In this sense, the

[26] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986).
[27] Linkon and Russo, "Class Confusions: American Media Discourse About Class."
[28] McNall, Levine, and Fantasia, "Introduction."

inequality discourse contributes to class-consciousness – and might very well result in new class formation leading to class based action.

I would like to specify what I consider to be social class issues in the Bernie Sanders campaign. Griffin and Tempenis use the following definition in their analysis:

"Class includes social class or social status as a general concept or social force; the experiences, position, identity, and rewards of class membership or of particular classes, class factions, or social strata; class- or status-based political party or project or outlook (e.g. socialism; trade unionism)."[29]

I find their definition useful because it is broad and includes elements both directly related to class definition ("experiences, position, identity, and rewards") while also including the more ideological and political outlook of positions that are informed by class experiences ("socialism, trade unionism"). Both are important for an understanding of what includes social class discourse in the texts I have worked with.

1.5 Method

This paper uses several different strategies to answer the question of changes in political social class discourse, as is appropriate for a thesis in American studies – a field characterized amongst others by its interdisciplinary approach. The initial position in my research was that I wanted to find out what was special about the way Bernie Sanders talked. I could tell that the content was different from what I was used to hearing from an American politician, and that his vocabulary matched what I was beginning to get used to hearing from left-leaning people my own age in the United States. I wanted to find out how he spoke in detail, where his language came from, and where he fit in American political and intellectual history. In other words, the question became one of contextualizing the Bernie Sanders campaign linguistically, politically, and ideologically. This paper combines elements of critical discourse analysis, class analysis, and American intellectual and political history.

The method used in this paper is based on Norman Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis. Marianne Winther Jørgensen and Louise Philips write that the purpose of discourse analysis is to "shed light on the linguistic-discursive dimension

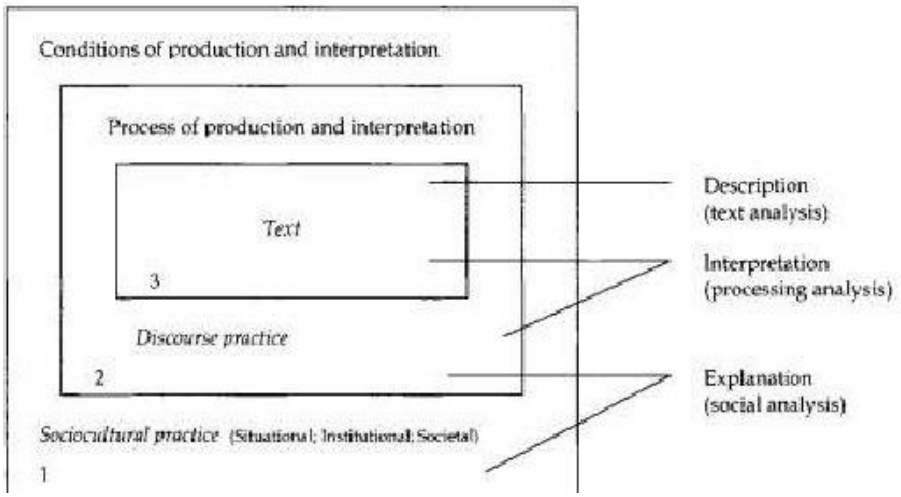
[29] Griffin and Tempenis, "Class, Multiculturalism and the American Quarterly."98.

of social and cultural phenomenon and processes of change in late modernity."[30] In other words, discourse analysis is the study of the social world through the language we use to describe it and act in it. In the case of this paper, it is the study of the rise of a political movement and increased class-consciousness in the United States, through the language they use. The linguistic and non-linguistic elements are in a dialectic relationship: "Representations can be seen, then, as both reflective and constitutive of class identity and cultural ideas about class."[31] Essentially, discourse analysis encompasses a number of ways of interpreting language politically and ideologically.

Fairclough works with a three-part model for analysis: discursive practice, text and social practice.[32] Discursive practice includes tracing the production and consumption of the text, as well as intertextuality and interdiscursivity.[33] Tools for analysis of the text itself include interactional control, metaphors, selection of words, and grammar. Finally, the first two dimensions are contextualized with the third (social practice) by outlining the discourse order the discourse is a part of and the non-discursive aspects that frame the discourse.[34] However, it is important to emphasize that the process of analyzing the three elements is more of a hermeneutic circle, as all three levels of the model exist in a dialectic relationship with each other. Figure 1 illustrates the three-part model as three boxes within each other. The textual analysis itself involves describing the properties of the text. The interpretation of the text's relationship with discursive practice involves for example tying the textual elements to ideology and previous discourse. The social analysis bit, finally, provides context for the two other aspects – explaining how and why texts, discourses and ideologies emerge at the specific times they do.

[30] «Formålet med den kritiske diskursanalyse er at kaste lys på den lingvistisk-diskursive dimension af sociale og kulturelle fænomener og forandringsprocesser i senmoderniteten.» Marianne Winther Jørgensen and Louise Philips, "Utdrag Av Diskursanalyse Som Teori Og Metode," in *Diskursanalyse Som Teori Og Metode* (Roskilde Universitetsforlag, 1999).

[31] Linkon and Russo, "Class Confusions: American Media Discourse About Class."
[32] Jørgensen and Philips, "Utdrag Av Diskursanalyse Som Teori Og Metode."93.
[33] Ibid. 93-4.
[34] Ibid. 98.



Figur 1: Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis. From Mirzaee & Hamidi (2012)

Critical discourse analysis views discourse (language) as one among several forms of social action – working in a dialectical relationship with non-linguistic forms of social action. Fairclough argues for a transdisciplinary approach to critical discourse analysis, allowing the research question to determine what methods are useful in order to achieve as much insight as possible. While textual analysis works with the text by itself, discourse analysis is a process of heavy contextualization – it is concerned with "the interdisciplinary nature of the thing."[35]

The class analysis elements applied here are not Marxist or Weberian, but based on the British economist Guy Standing's categorization of seven new classes in the neoliberal global economy, involving among others, an elite which together with a global plutocracy act as the effective ruling class. I will elaborate on these further in chapter 2. The most significant element of Standing's new theory of class for this thesis, however, is his identification of what class struggle consists of in the 21st century. He writes that it "will involve a struggle for redistribution of the key assets needed for a good life in a good society."[36] In the contemporary neoliberal economy those assets are "not the 'means of production,' but socio-economic security, control of time, quality

[35] http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-ideas&month=1109&week=d&msg=W1wLkODppuo2uGl5dTxUUg&user=&pw=
[36] Guy Standing, "O Precariado E a Luta De Classes," [The Precariat and Class Struggle.] *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 103 (2014). 1.

space, knowledge (or education, financial knowledge and financial capital."[37] As I illustrate in the forthcoming chapters, many of these elements are what the 99 percent are accusing the 1 percent of holding, and they demand redistribution.

1.6 Thesis Outline

The goal of this research paper is to identify and analyze a discursive shift. American political social class discourse has been dominated by one hegemonic discourse for several decades, challenged in different ways through the 1990s and 2000s; however, none of these discursive challenges have been cohesive or conceptually powerful enough to cause a fundamental discursive shift. However, the fall of 2011 saw the rise of the Occupy Wall Street movement with their massively successful slogan "We are the 99 percent," starting a new social class discourse, which has continued to develop and spread in American public and political discourse over the past five years. The protests faded out by the end of 2013, but the discourse has remained, simultaneously fueling and constituted by an increasing class consciousness that has made economic inequality (in other words, social class matters) the number one issue of the 2016 Democratic presidential primary season. I have chosen to refer to this new discourse as a discourse of inequality, as that is its focus – not poverty or the lower classes, but the economic difference between people. Furthermore, its explicitly stated implications for American democracy – the political inequalities associated with too much economic inequality[38] – can also be contained in the phrase "inequality discourse."

The next chapter (chapter 2) defines the social class discourse that has been dominant in the United States since the early 1980s and which the new inequality discourse challenges. Relying mainly on secondary sources, I will also present some of the challenges to the traditional discourse that appeared through the 1990s and 2000s. Some elements (discourse strands?) from these early challenges can be found in the more cohesive inequality discourse that represents the major challenge today – such as a

[37] Ibid.
[38] Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens," *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 3 (2014).

negative focus on the very rich. I also present neoliberalism and a modern categorization of classes that have appeared in the neoliberal global economy.

Chapter 3 contains the main analysis of primary sources, identifying the characteristics of the new discourse of inequality as it is represented in the primary election. I describe how the Bernie Sanders campaign is a part of a larger discourse of inequality that has been developing for several years, and which owes some of its most recognizable vocabulary from the Occupy Wall Street movement. It is a democratic and anti-elitist discourse, with a revolutionary (or at least oppositional) agenda. Bernie Sanders' ties with Occupy Wall Street are both discursive and non-discursive – in other words, their connection is linguistic, political and ideological, and represented in social action.

In chapter 4, I further contextualize the Bernie Sanders campaign historically by drawing lines to President Roosevelt and the New Deal. Sanders' ties to Roosevelt are explicitly stated, and they are visible in both his language and his policies. I argue that his New Deal approach should be interpreted as a strategy against the crisis of neoliberal capitalism, as it in essence is a return to the political agenda and project that dominated before the emergence of neoliberalism. Furthermore, I describe Sanders' version of the American Dream and place it in the tradition of Obama.

2 1980-2007: Rising Income Inequality and the Formation of an Elite Class

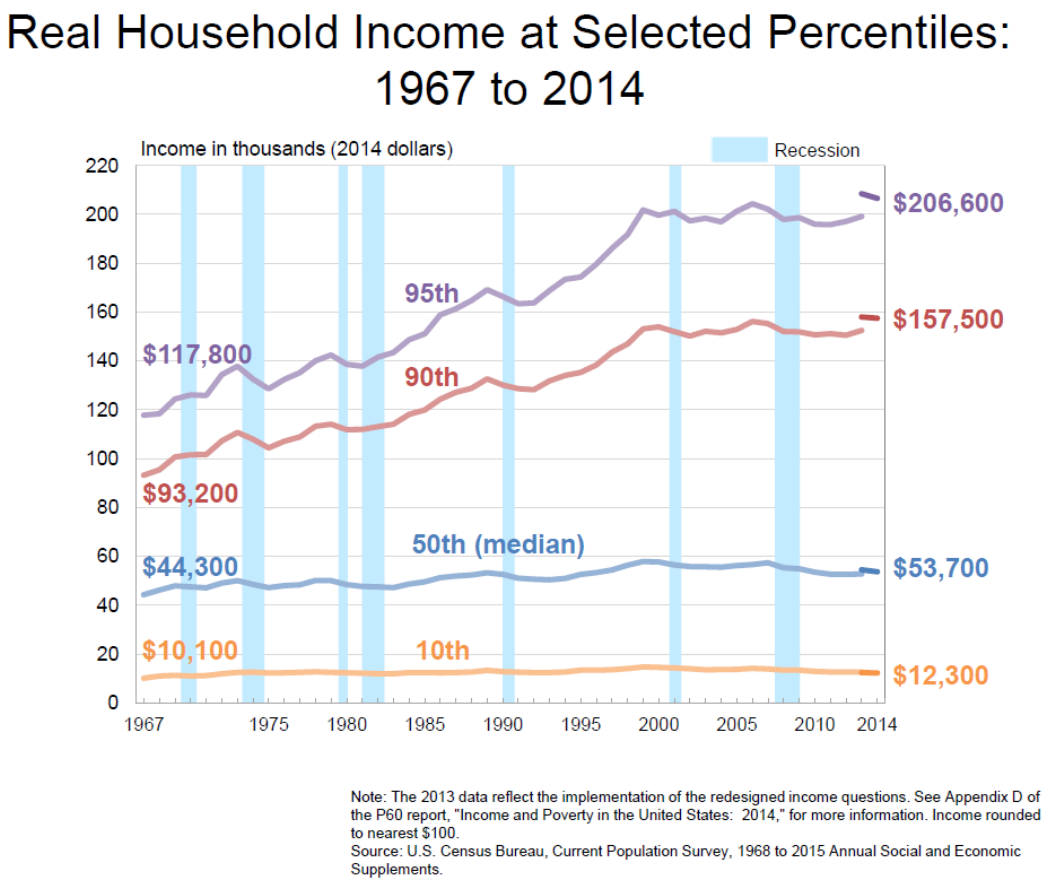
In this chapter, I attempt to answer the question of what might stand in the way of class-consciousness, and what, historically, has stood in the way of class-consciousness in recent American political history. As this thesis rests on the theoretical understanding that class consciousness and class action stem from how we talk about social class (and, of course, the other way around – that how we talk about social class affects the level and scope of class consciousness and action), I argue that the traditional discourse of social class has stood in the way of class based political action in this period. A belief in the primacy of the market and growth, an individualist conception of the American dream, and a desire for smaller government has informed and defined the traditional discourse, represented largely in this chapter by President Ronald Reagan. The findings of this chapter stand in contrast to the renewed class-consciousness associated with Occupy Wall Street and their "99 percent," which has seen its political continuation in the Bernie Sanders primary election campaign this past year – which will be discussed in the following chapters. In other words, this chapter attempts to answer the question of what might stand in the way of class-consciousness (which we have established is the subjective part of class formation), and what the traditional conception of social class has been in American political discourse.

There has been a steady rise in income and wealth inequality in the United States since the 1970s, producing a new elite class that have been conceptualized as the "billionaire class" or the "1 percent" in political and public discourse. This rising income inequality, combined with the 2007-8 financial crisis, the government's responsiveness in dealing with the crisis, and the following downturn in the economy, are some of the issues and events leading up to the development of the inequality discourse which will be further detailed in the next chapters. Economics and public policy professor David R. Howell compares the post 1980s period to the roaring 20s and

goes as far as to call it an" Age of Inequality,"[39] while the French economist Thomas Piketty and the Princeton political scientist Larry M. Bartels called it "New Gilded Age."[4041]

The economists Emmanuel Saez and Thomas Piketty were the first ones to shed light on the top 1 percent of the wealth and income hierarchy all the way from 1913 to 1998.[42] In 2003, they published a report based on tax return data that concluded that the share of wealth and income of the top 1 and 0.1 percent had increased drastically since the 1970s. According to Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman in 2014, "The increase in wealth concentration is due to the surge of top incomes combined with an increase in savings rate inequality."[43] Much of the explanation for the increase in inequality has been the massive growth in the top segment's income. In other words, the rising income inequality can be explained in large part from the wealthiest part of the population becoming wealthier. As the graph from the US Census Bureau below illustrates, the real income of the top 10 percent and above has been rising almost consistently since 1967, while the median income and below have remained about the same.

[39] David R. Howell, "The Austerity of Low Pay: Us Exceptionalism in the Age of Inequality," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (2013).
[40] Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (United States: The President and Fellows of Harvard College 2014).
[41] Robert Pollin, "Review of Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age," *Journal of Economic Literature* XLVIII (2010).
[42] Emmanuel Saez and Thomas Piketty, "Income Inequality in the United States, 1913–1998," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* CXVIII, no. 1 (2003).
[43] Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, "Wealth Inequality in the United States since 1913: Evidence from Capitalized Income Data," in *NBER Working Paper* (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2014). Abstract.



Figur 2: Real Household Income at Selected Percentiles: 1967 to 2014. From US Census Bureau[44]

According to political scientists Eric Keller and Nathan J. Kelly, Republicans and Democrats have largely come together on issues of financial deregulation since the early 1980s. They argue that there has been "partisan convergence"[45] on matters of financial regulation (in favor of deregulation) since the early 1980s. In other words, Democrats and Republicans through the 80s and 90s mostly agreed on policies in this area, despite growing polarization generally and on other policies. Kelly and Keller argue that deregulation of the financial sector – in other words, less government intervention – leads to the financial sector being "more able to enrich itself relative to the rest of society."[46] In other words, the financial sector has increased its wealth over the past few decades.

[44] US Census Bureau, "Current Population Survey, 1968 to 2015," (2015).
[45] Eric Keller and Nathan J. Kelly, "Partisan Politics, Financial Deregulation, and the New Gilded Age," *Political Research Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2015).
[46] Ibid. Page 439.

The rise in inequality has been explained by many as a consequence of an ideological shift from viewing government as responsible for redistribution and fighting inequality to the primacy of market principles. According to Howell:

> *Around 1980 the United States embarked on a great 'laissez-faire experiment' (Freeman 2010). This new policy regime reflected a sharp ideological shift toward free market orthodoxy, itself a reaction to the labor union militancy, expanding welfare rolls, poor productivity performance and high inflation rates of the 1970s.*[47]

The "lasseiz-faire" experiment he is referring to is due to the increasing influence of neoliberalism on government and policymaking, encouraging amongst others the deregulation of financial markets and the downscaling (even the destruction) of the welfare state. According to Fairclough, the neoliberal era has been characterized by "'free markets' (the freeing of markets from state intervention and regulation), and attempts at reducing the state's responsibility for providing social welfare"[48] after a period of more social democratic moves in governments towards increasing redistribution of wealth and welfare. In his detailed account of the history of neoliberalism, Daniel Stedman Jones defines transatlantic neoliberalism as "the free market ideology based on individual liberty and limited government that connected human freedom to the actions of the rational, self-interested actor in the competitive marketplace."[49] It was a "new political agenda," ready to "replace New Deal and Great Society liberalism" in the United States.[50]

Perhaps the most recurring theme in the scholarly works on neoliberalism reviewed for this thesis is the assessment that it is a complex phenomenon which should not be reduced to any monolithic definition that excludes either its ideological or its material aspects.[51] According to Daniel Stedman Jones, in his 2012 monograph *Masters of the Universe*, the term is "too often used as a catch-all shorthand for the horrors

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[47] Howell, "The Austerity of Low Pay: Us Exceptionalism in the Age of Inequality." Page 795.
[48] Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Page 11-12.
[49] Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). Page 2.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Philip Mirowski, "About Dieter Plehwe. Bernhard Walpen & Gisela Neunhoffer, Eds, Neoliberal Hegemony: A Global Critique (London, Routledge, 2006); and David Harvey, a Brief History of Neoliberalism(Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005)." *European Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 6 (2006). 461.

associated with globalization and recurring financial crises."[52] His book is a history of neoliberalism as it developed first in response to the threat of socialism, National Socialism and communism in Europe in the 1930s. In other words, it began as a European intellectual reform project by right wing economists against the dominance of various forms of social democracies.

Wendy Brown, in her article "American Nightmare," writes that "in order to comprehend neoliberalism's political and cultural effects, it must be conceived of as more than a set of free market economic policies" that destroy the welfare state and increase economic inequality.[53] She defines neoliberalism as a political rationality, in other words, as something that goes deeper than simple ideology:

> *"a political rationality is a specific form of normative political reason organizing the political sphere, governance practices, and citizenship. A political rationality governs the sayable, the intelligible, and the truth criteria of these domains."*[54]

Especially the last aspect of Brown's definition is relevant to my understanding of neoliberalism, as it defines it as a kind of discourse. In short, we can say that neoliberalism is an ideology and a political agenda that seeks to further individualism and the free market, and calls for limited government whose main role should be securing the proper functioning of the free market. In other words, it rejects expansive government welfare programs and regulation of the free market. However, it does not completely reject government, as it is necessary for the implementation and construction of the free market. In the event of a crisis or recession, the government may provide security and loans to failing banks and businesses, as was done across many countries during the 2007-8 financial crises. It is also a driving force behind globalization, as free trade agreements and the free flow of capital across borders facilitate the growth of the free market.

In an essay published in the Norwegian newspaper *Morgenbladet* in April 2016, anthropology professor Thomas Hylland Eriksen and philosophy professor Arne Johan Vetlesen call neoliberalism "a deeply set political discourse where the goal is 'the

[52] Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics*. 2.
[53] Wendy Brown, "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization," *Political Theory* 34, no. 6 (2006). Page 693.
[54] Ibid.

programmatic destruction of collectives' because they limit the implementation of the pure market's logic in all central areas of society."[55] They take their definition from Pierre Bourdieu's 1998 article, which defines neoliberalism as "A programme for destroying collective structures which may impede the pure market logic."[56] This destruction of collectives is central to my thesis, as it is the discursive nature of class-consciousness that is the overall topic it is trying to say something about. That neoliberalism's effect on American political class discourse – in other words, the removing of social class (collective) as a model for political action in favor of individualism – has made politically effective working class consciousness and action practically impossible in the United States. Collectives make the lower classes – normal citizens, without any special powers or excessive capital – more able to influence policymaking, through for example labor unions or political parties. The neoliberal political project has resulted in a globalized economy and the development of new class formations.

Before we move on to recent and changing perceptions of social class, I want to present a theory of class formation as it stands today. The old Marxist dichotomy of capitalists and proletariat will not do for explaining the real life counterpart to the elite classes against which the American left is increasingly positioning itself. The British economist Guy Standing has created a new model of class belonging in the contemporary global economy, which includes seven categories. The ruling class consists of two groups, one transnational plutocracy and one national elite, who "act as the effective ruling class, almost hegemonic in their current status." Furthermore, Standing writes that they "embody the neo-liberal state, and manipulate politicians and the media while relying on financial agencies to maintain the rules in their favour."[57] It is this elite class that the renewed American left is revolting against – as seen in the inequality discourse and the attempts at (political) revolution. Their class-consciousness is seen as problematic.

[55] Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Arne Johan Vetlesen, "Nyliberalismens Ektefødte Barn," *Morgenbladet*, 15-21 April 2016. My translation: "en dyptgående politisk diskurs der målet er «den metodisk gjennomførte destruksjon av kollektiver» fordi de begrenser innføringen av det rene markedets logikk på samtlige sentrale samfunnsområder."
[56] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Essence of Neoliberalism: Utopia of Endless Exploitation," *Le Monde Diplomatique*1998.
[57] Standing, "O Precariado E a Luta De Classes." Page 2.

Below the elite is the salariat (a sort of middle class), who are the ones with "long-term employment security, high salaries and extensive enterprise or corporate benefits."[58] In other words, they are in a position of financial security and other benefits, which in the United States would include for example corporate healthcare coverage. Below the salariat are the proficians, who are generally self-employed, earning high incomes, but who are overworked to the extent of causing negative health repercussions. Below them again is the old proletariat, which is a shrinking group as their traditional jobs in industry and manufacturing are increasingly being outsourced to other countries.

Standing identifies what he calls a "class in the making" – the precariat. The term comes from a combination of the proletariat of industrial societies, and the word precarious (which refers to a position of insecurity or instability). Their position of lacking financial and job security is what defines this new group:

> *"Essentially, their labour is insecure and unstable, so that it is associated with casualisation, informalisation, agency labour, part-time labour, phoney self-employment and the new mass phenomenon of crowd-labour."*[59]

In other words, they lack the ties to secure labor that gave the old proletariat a sense of stability. In the American setting their position is even more precarious than in many European countries, as they often lack access to affordable health care and many of them cannot afford an education. He moves on by dividing the precariat into three categories, the last of which is important for this thesis. They are educated, lack job security, and are negative about the future if the system continues as it does today. They are also, importantly, aware of their situation and "experience … a sense of relative deprivation and status frustration." They are the part of the precariat that Standing believes could have a transformative effect.

Standing calls the precariat a class in the making, rather than a class for itself, because it has not yet reached the transformative stage. Referring to the "mass protests" of 2011 (including Occupy Wall Street, which I will return to in further detail in the next chapter), he writes that:

> *"As it invents a new language of progress through collective action, the precariat must avoid falling into the well-laid trap of postulating itself as*

[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid. 3.

> *"revolutionary", an image that is terminally tainted by 20th century history. It must also avoid the sterility of being "reformist", which is what the state would wish it to be, pushing for marginal refinements to the status quo. To become a class-for-itself, the precariat must be* transformative*."*[60]

Standing prescribes neither revolution nor reform as a remedy to the inequalities seen in the neoliberal state, warning against both the tainted label of revolution and the ineffective push for reform within the status quo. What he calls for is transformation – a new system of redistribution. In other words, in the Democratic Party presidential primaries this season, one could call both the Sanders and Clinton campaigns misguided in Standing's eyes, as the former is calling for a revolution, while the latter seeks to reform within the current system. I will revisit Standing's views on bettering the situation for the precariat in chapter 4 where I will discuss a renewed New Deal liberalism as a possibly effective response to the crisis of neoliberal capitalism.

It important to remember that neoliberal influence is not limited to the political right or Republican. In the United States, the period that saw the implementation of the neoliberal political agenda began in the "high inflation years of the 1970s."[61] However, "Important differences between Democrats and Republicans on economic policy did continue after the 1970s. But the terms of the debate had shifted decisively away from New Deal/Great Society-type commitments to egalitarianism."[62] In chapter 4, I will argue that Sanders' approach in opposition to neoliberalism is a return to those egalitarian commitments. In other words, while neoliberalism developed in opposition to socialism, social democracies and New Deal liberalism, he revolts against a neoliberal society by returning to the principles it originally set out to replace. Before returning to those questions in more detail in later chapters, I will further expand on the implementation of the neoliberal agenda in American political discourse, and the role played by President Reagan in doing so.

A belief in supply side or "trickle down" economics, the primacy of economic growth, minimal government intervention in the marked and financial sector, and an individualistic notion of social class characterized Reagan's presidency. The text, which, according to political historians, most defines the principles of the period, is

[60] Ibid. 6.
[61] Pollin, "Review of Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age." Page 153.
[62] Ibid.

President Reagan's inaugural address in 1981. It is widely considered a "foundational statement of Reagan's governing philosophy and of contemporary conservatism."[63] Jones and Rowland (2015) write that the affect President Reagan's inaugural address had on public opinion went deeper than affecting support on specific policies, on which he was generally unsuccessful. Rather, they argue Reagan's influence was fundamental and ideological – he famously said that "government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem."[64] With his speech, "Reagan succeeded in redefining the worldview the public had about government itself."[65] At the time, the New York Times had gone as far as to call "Reagan's agenda 'a conservative counterpoint to Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'New Deal''."[66] This fits my argument that the neoliberal political agenda of free markets, individualism and the primacy of economic growth replaced the New Deal project of egalitarianism, collectivism and the primacy of ameliorating human suffering.

Reagan's individualistic discourse serves the purpose of neoliberalism as political project because it defines a role of government according to neoliberal principles. First, the goal is market growth, which in theory will benefit the whole nation, but that in reality (without redistributive polices) only benefit the "capitalists" (which in the neoliberal state are the elite and to some degree the salariat). This definition led among other the deregulation of financial institutions described by Kelly and Keller above. Second, his individualistic version of the American Dream casts the government as an enemy of progress and the well-being of the people. By naming the government as the problem, not the solution, he defines away redistributive policies such as government funded education and health care as a viable direction to go in. In doing so, he contributed to the neoliberal agenda, which ultimately led to the crisis of 2007-8 and the economic inequality facing the United States today. It is this individualistic discourse the inequality discourse of Sanders and Occupy challenges.

The American Dream is essential to any study of American politics or history wishing to say something about the conceptualization of social class. As narrative of

[63] John M. Jones and Robert C. Rowland, "Redefining the Proper Role of Government: Ultimate Definition in Reagan's First Inaugural," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 18, no. 4 (2015).
[64] Ronald Reagan, "Inaugural Address," (1981).
[65] Jones and Rowland, "Redefining the Proper Role of Government: Ultimate Definition in Reagan's First Inaugural." 694.
[66] Ibid. 692.

progress, prosperity and social mobility, the American Dream is in many ways the American "story" about social class. As discourse, it ties together the themes of social class and American exceptionalism. The American Dream exists in many different forms, but the core idea is a rags-to-riches story – in America, hard work can make you anything you want to be, regardless of your starting point. In other words, "no system of social stratification stands in the way of individual success."[67] One classic American Dream story is of the immigrant who came to America with only three dollars in his pockets, who 20 years later lives comfortably in a middle class home in a suburb with his family, now able to send his kids to college. At the heart of the dream lies a promise of social mobility, or at least the opportunity for social mobility – the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." In other words, its foundation is in the Declaration of Independence, one of the United States' founding documents, and perhaps the most important declaration of a unifying American ideology.

American historian James Truslow Adams popularized the American Dream in 1931 with *The Epic of America*. There he defines it as "a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."[68] In other words, the American dream represents a vision of America in which every citizen should be able to become what he or she wants to (within their personal abilities) no matter what their parents were. However, "one of the sources of the American Dream's enduring strength is that it has always been a *dream* for the future, not existing reality."[69] The dream analogy indicates a vision for what people want America to be, making it a powerful narrative for politicians to use to "paint a picture" of what they are going to work towards if elected or if that bill is passed.

In American political discourse, different conceptualizations of the American dream indicate different positions on government responsibility in securing economic equality among citizens, and especially its role in securing the opportunity for upward

[67] William E. Hudson, *American Democracy in Peril: Eight Challenges to America's Future*, 7th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc., 2013). 272.
[68] Martin J. Medhurst, "Lbj, Reagan, and the American Dream: Competing Visions of Liberty," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (2016). 100.
[69] Hudson, *American Democracy in Peril: Eight Challenges to America's Future*. 273.

social mobility. Scholars of presidential rhetoric have conceptualized these differences in several ways, but they are essentially talking about the same dichotomy of positions – one in favor of more government, and one in favor of less. Both positions share the goal of achieving the American dream. John M. Jones and Robert C. Rowland identify the difference as one between liberalism and conservatism, arguing that Reagan "co-opted" the progressiveness of liberalism in his inaugural in order to redefine the American dream in conservative terms.[70] Others have identified it as a difference between Republicans and Democrats. Martin J. Medhurst argues that, rather than ideological or partisan differences, different conceptions of the American dream come from different conceptualizations of liberty itself. He compares Reagan's inaugural with Lyndon B. Johnson's, and finds that what separates their notions of the American dream is the difference between negative and positive liberty, respectively.[71] According to Jones and Rowland, "The two variants of the American Dream can be used either to support strong action by government to achieve the dream or to disqualify such action as unneeded."[72]

As discussed above, Reagan redefined the Dream in an individualistic setting – government should not stand in the way of Americans pursuing their happy life. Individuals are the heroes of his narrative, working hard to reach their goals, but the government interferes at every turn with their taxation and regulations. The individualistic version of the American Dream is still very much alive today, informing ideas about social class. Donald Trump, the presumed Republican presidential candidate, presents himself as a self-made businessman and argues that he is qualified to serve as president of the United States on that. Carly Fiorina, a Republican candidate that dropped out early in the process, said in one of her introductory statements, "My story, from secretary to CEO, is only possible in this nation."[73] This stands in contrast to the American dreams of Presidents Roosevelt and Johnson, who believed the proper role of government should be in securing the dream through Social Security and other redistributive policies. Their version of it will be revisited in chapter 4, where I describe

[70] Jones and Rowland, "Redefining the Proper Role of Government: Ultimate Definition in Reagan's First Inaugural."
[71] Medhurst, "Lbj, Reagan, and the American Dream: Competing Visions of Liberty."
[72] Jones and Rowland, "Redefining the Proper Role of Government: Ultimate Definition in Reagan's First Inaugural." 706.
[73] Debates, "Republican Candidates Debate in Simi Valley, California."

Sanders' dream, which not surprisingly also involves a government that secures the basic social needs of their citizens.

While the traditional discourse of social class described above remained dominant in the period, Linkon and Russo found in their study of social class in the 1990s that the public discourse was "confused." By this, they mean that new patterns of talking about class emerged which reflected changes in the American economy, and reflected "anxieties about class identity and class relations."[74] These patterns were not yet fully formed, described as "extremely fluid and indefinite," appearing both separately and combined together in a text. In other words, Linkon and Russo argue that the 1990s was a period of "semiotic disruption" or "discursive panic" on the topic of social class in public discourse, which is the kind of discourse that appears "at historical moments of conflict and change, and it may both reflect and construct anxieties about class position."[75] The changes that were taking place in the 1990s that likely affected the social class discourse was increasing globalization, causing factories to move production out of the country, leaving many unemployed. Technological changes also contributed to the instability. In general, Linkon and Russo show that the 1990s saw a public discourse with a renewed interest in social class. They identify four emerging patterns of talking about social class, one of which is "the development of an oppositional model focused on an elite class as the other."[76]

Opposition to an elite class is central to the social class discourse developed in response to the increasing economic inequality in the United States and the financial crisis of 2007-8. I will argue in the next chapter that the concepts of the "1 percent" and the "billionaire class" refer to an elite group whose rapidly increasing wealth has accompanied growing political power, which is viewed as both amoral and destructive for the American economy by its opponents. While I tie the rise of this discourse to the Occupy Wall Street and 99 percent movements, the oppositional "elite as the other" model of Linkon and Russo provide further insight into its development. These are the beginnings of the construction of the neoliberal elite ruling class Standing identifies in the mind of the American public through discourse. In other words, the neoliberal political agenda has resulted in the formation of an elite class, which increasingly

[74] Linkon and Russo, "Class Confusions: American Media Discourse About Class." 368.
[75] Ibid. 370.
[76] Ibid. 371.

became a figure in American public discourse in the 1990s, and which now is imagined as the 1 percent or billionaire class in the new inequality discourse.

According to a Washington Post column, "the source of class struggle in the mid-90s is not the working class, but the elite."[77] In other words, rather than the traditional Marxist view of class struggle and class-consciousness developing in the working classes, the class based political action of the 90s in the United States came from the elite. Their form of class action, fitting with our neoliberal perspective, "take the form of scapegoating the underclass, regressive tax laws, and an attack on entitlements for everyone but the wealthy."[78] This fits with Standing's definition of the neoliberal elite class, manipulating politicians in order to maintain their position. Significantly, this is an active class in the sense that it has developed a political agenda based on class belonging. In the next chapter, I will illustrate how the elite is currently being accused of class warfare, a negatively connoted term for class action against others in American public discourse. Ironically, the accusation has generally come from the elite in face of criticism or demand for public goods by the lower classes – now the term has been turned back around on them.

A final element of the 90s class discourse identified by Linkon and Russo that links it to the inequality discourse I identify is the return of an oppositional model of class. This opposition, however, is not defined from the criticizers own class standing, but from the elite:

"As these examples suggest, traditional visions of class warfare in contemporary discourse do not focus on describing the class most readers belong to but on examining the class readers are assumed to envy and oppose. Working-class and middle-class identities are erased here, though class opposition continues to claim center stage."[79]

In other words, the focus is on the "other," not themselves. Class belonging and class-consciousness is reassigned to an elite rather than the lower classes. The inequality discourse in the next chapter blurs the differences between all classes but the 1 percent by gathering them all in the 99 percent. Their class-consciousness and shared experience is in the form of opposition to an elite. As Linkon and Russo show, this form was already starting to take shape in the public discourse of the 90s. Linkon and Russo

[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid. 372.
[79] Ibid.

have described new ideas about social class developing in American public discourse in response to slow changes in the economy, causing anxiety about class position.

Sometimes major events suddenly influence the discourse by challenging its presumptions. In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, leaving devastation and misery in its wake. Poor people (often African-American) were hit hardest, and for weeks, national news broadcasts and papers covered the tragedy, during which the government failed to quickly and effectively provide relief to the hurricane's victims. Zebroski describes how, "Suddenly through September, people were talking about poverty and class and the federal government's obligation to mitigate, if not solve, the 'problem.'"[80] What Zebroski views as significant is the fact that the media suddenly talked about social class as an issue the government had any responsibility in handling. The brief challenge of the traditional discourse has been noted by several others as well: "Less than a decade ago, the vivid images of the abandoned poor in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina drew the attention of the national media to rising poverty and inequality in America."[81] This redefinition of government's role in securing the economic welfare of the population is another theme that is retained in the new inequality discourse. This discourse, which I will begin to describe in the chapter below, has developed from its earlier strands in the 1990s and early 2000s – reflecting many of the same concerns about globalization and class warfare from the elite, as well as the sudden financial crisis of 2007-8.

In this chapter, I have argued that the dominant social class discourse in American politics since President Reagan has been an individualistic one, emphasizing a very limited role for government as it sees government as a hindrance to human well-being rather than a vehicle for it. The political rationale behind this belief in minimizing government interference is neoliberalism, which began as an intellectual and political project in revolt against the primacy of various forms of social democratic governments in Europe in the 1930s. That agenda was a success, and the neoliberal political rationale for the primacy of markets with government interference limited to those aspects where it secures the maintenance or expansion of the free markets, has been dominant in the United States and the global economy since the mid-1970s. This has caused major

[80] Zebroski, "Social Class as Discourse: Mapping the Landscape of Class in Rhetoric and Composition."523.
[81] Hudson, *American Democracy in Peril: Eight Challenges to America's Future*. 265.

economic inequality, especially in the United States, which has led to the formation of new classes in the global economy, amongst them an elite ruling class that manipulates policymaking in order to maintain its own position. While these changes have been highlighted by the financial crisis of 2007-8 (which Fairclough calls the crisis of neoliberal capitalism), they did not go completely unnoticed before then. The public discourse of the 90s and early 2000s saw the development of discursive strands, which eventually formed into the inequality discourse that today poses a significant challenge to the individualistic discourse of Reagan.

3 Occupy Wall Street, Bernie Sanders, and the New Discourse of Inequality

The political social class discourse of the Bernie Sanders campaign can be defined by identifying which discourse strands (or themes) overlap or reoccur together. Using a few different categories, as outlined in Florian Schneider's simple yet brilliant guide to discourse analysis, I have coded some of Sanders' speeches and statements in order to see which discourse strands come together with that of social class.[82] This method allows for a better understanding of the rationality the discourse in question relies on. The themes that most strongly overlap with social class in the texts I have coded are democracy and morality. The conception of social class used is oppositional and collectivist – if the suppressed classes come together in a grassroots movement and demand to be heard, they can surpass the power of the small wealthy elite that now controls policymaking. In this chapter, I will present the social class discourse of the Bernie Sanders campaign and tie it with the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011. Together, I argue, they make up a renewed class-consciousness in the United States, which exists in a dialectic relationship with the new political social class discourse, which has changed how people understand their own position in the social and political order.

The discourse presented in the previous chapter is one informed by a neoliberal political rationality, which values individualism and market principles, and undermines collectives. This chapter will begin the interpretation of the Bernie Sanders campaign as a "strategy" in response to the crisis of neoliberal capitalism – in other words, as an attempt to remedy the failing structures that have caused increasing income inequality over the last 40 years, and which lead to the 2007-8 financial crisis and following Recession. This fight takes the form of a kind of democratic struggle of the many (not a specific class, but ideally the whole nation or the 99 percent) against a single elite class, whose control over the democratic process and policymaking is negatively affecting everyone else.

[82] Florian Schneider to PoliticsEastAsia.com, 2013, http://www.politicseastasia.com/studying/how-to-do-a-discourse-analysis/.

In the past few years, a myriad of grassroots campaigns have appeared all over the Western world in opposition to what they perceive to be the unjust and unrestrained power of the world's economic elite. International corporations, big banks, tax havens, corruption – an increased focus on social and economic justice characterizes the last few years, especially since the 2007-8 global financial crisis. While it began in the United States, the Occupy movement was a global phenomenon –spread by social media. This reflects the global nature of the phenomenon it protests – growing global income inequality, as well as within nations; an increasingly global market over which they have no control (however, which is prone to intermittent crashes and crises that do affect them); and what they perceive to be a decreasingly democratic system. I believe the growing opposition to the "plutocracy" and national elites are a part of the process of the formation of a new class – the "precariat" of Guy Standing.[83] However, as I am analyzing one campaign within a currently ongoing election, gaining an accurate idea of exactly who is voting for Sanders is difficult (access to exit poll numbers are behind a paywall, for example). What is clear, however, is who the movement, campaign and their discourse are fighting *against*, and that is the elite ruling class described by Standing.

McNall, Levine and Fantasia build on Eric Hobsbawn's understanding of class-consciousness, writing that it is "a group's awareness and understanding of itself that grows out of opposition to other groups."[84] In other words, the understanding of one's place in relation to economic and political power is relative – it comes from the identification of other groups whose relation to capital is different from oneself. In the United States today, that "other" group is the 1 percent – often conflated with the "billionaire class" and sometimes even Wall Street, big business, big banks, and corporate America. I have looked over several of Sanders' speeches from the primary election, looking for the protagonists and antagonists of his narrative. In other words, who are "we" and who are "they"? The recurring antagonists are the "billionaire class," the "1 percent," and Wall Street and the big banks. The discourse is oppositional in that it calls for class-based action against an economic elite, which is perceived to be greedy and corrupt. I will address the different terms and concepts, attempt to trace their circulation, and discuss their significance.

[83] Standing, "O Precariado E a Luta De Classes."
[84] McNall, Levine, and Fantasia, "Introduction." Page 7.

Bernie Sanders talks about social class issues in terms of income inequality – inequality being the crucial word – by setting the greed and corruption of Wall Street, the billionaire class, and the "1 percent" up against the interests of hard working Americans, the working and middle classes, and the "99 percent" – in other words, the interest of all of us. Sanders and his campaign represent a recent strand in American political discourse (most commonly attributed to the Occupy movement) which has conceptually redefined class lines somewhere between the dichotomies of the "working and middle classes" versus the "millionaires" and "billionaires," and the "99 percent" versus the "1 percent." I choose to call the phenomenon percentage talk much because it has become normalized in American public and political discourse – not just in the form of the 1 percent and 99 percent, but in other income dispersion dichotomies (the 20 percent and the 80 percent, for example).

The percentage talk in American political class discourse started with the slogan "we are the 99 percent." Since 2011, talking about social class in terms of percentages has become increasingly common in American political and public discourse. People talk about the "top" and "bottom" percentages of the population (in terms of wealth and income). The "wealthiest 1 percent" is much less ambiguous than an "upper class" or "economic elite," as there is only one variable determining which group you belong to – your income relative to the rest of the population. Modern social class belonging (working class, middle class, upper class) is more complex as it also involves other social capital than economic (education, etc.). The singular focus on income and wealth rings of Marx, whose classes were determined by their ties to production and ownership – in other words, economic capital determined class belonging.[85]

Furthermore, percentages are associated with scientific discourse – it implies verifiability and accuracy, in other words, knowledge on the subject in question. Percentages are mathematical, and applied in presenting research. References to actual percentages imply that there has been an inquiry. In political speech, this gives validity to the speaker as it implies that the opinions or policies argued for are based on scientific research. When Sanders talks about the "top tenth of 1 percent," he is citing

[85] Ibid.

the studies presented in chapter 2, the first of which came out in 2003.[86] Follow up studies were published in 2012 and 2014.

What catapulted the "percentage talk" into popular discourse was the 99 percent project, what in many ways is the social media activism version of Occupy Wall Street. Their bio on Tumblr reads: "Brought to you by the people who occupy wall street."[87] The 99 percent slogan appeared on the popular social media blogging platform Tumblr.com before protesters started occupying Wall Street. The "We are the 99 percent" blog posted its first post on August 23, 2011 by announcing the "99 Percent Project" in which they encouraged people to write their story of financial insecurity on a piece of paper with the words "I am the 99 percent" and "Occupy Together" written underneath, then take a picture and upload it to Tumblr.[88] October 2011 saw the most activity on the site, with hundreds of pictures posted of people with different stories.[89] Many are college students or recent graduates with debt and issues getting a job, often with parents who are unable to support their tuition and living costs. Some are young people who are unable to go to college at all due to the high costs. Some do not have health insurance. Some are from people who feel that they themselves are well off economically and health wise, but are against the unregulated power of the "1 percent" or otherwise wish to declare that they stand with and support the 99 percent.[90] One user declared herself a part of the 1 percent, ending her note with the words "TAX ME" in capital letters.[91]

The "1 percent" refers to the top one percent of the population based on wealth and income, as I explained in chapter 2. The term, however, has gained a more symbolic or conceptual meaning since being normalized in political discourse. Rather than referring to the top 1 percent *of* something, it is increasingly common to refer to the "top 1 percent," or simply "the 1 percent." In other words, it is no longer necessary to specify what they are percentages of to retain the meaning. That it refers to wealth and income of a segment of the population relative to the other is now a given. We can say that it is

[86] Saez and Piketty, "Income Inequality in the United States, 1913–1998."
[87] wearethe99percent to We are the 99 Percent, 2011, http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/Introduction.
[88] to We are the 99 Percent, 23 August, 2011, http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/post/9289779051/we-are-the-99-percent.
[89] to We are the 99 Percent, 2011, http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/archive/2011/10.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Tess ibid., 20 October, http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/post/11683420782.

on its way to becoming a concept, that is that it has a (historically and culturally contingent) meaning which is invoked by the term itself[92] – with no need for further explanation. The *Wikipedia* disambiguation page for "one percent" lists a link to the article "The wealthiest 1% of people in a country" as the first choice, and includes a link to the article "Upper class" for further reading.[93] Newspaper articles often refer to the "1 percent" as self-explanatory as well. A search on the *New York Times* website revealed article titles including "The Women of the 1 Percent," "The Self Destruction of the 1 Percent," "The Other 1 Percent," "Income and the Top 1 Percent," "Mom, Are We the 1 Percent?" "The Politics of the 1 Percent," and "Are the Candidates in the Top 1 Percent?."[94] In short, the usage is so commonplace that it no longer requires explanation.

In his speeches, Bernie Sanders talks about the "1 percent" and the "the top one-tenth of 1 percent."[95] The latter is almost invariably used as a measure of ownership against the bottom 90 percent, and the phrasing is some variant of the following across seven of the 16 speeches investigated: "the top one-tenth of 1 percent owns almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent."[96] Sanders mentions the group two more times, referring to the transfer of wealth from the "middle class"[97] and "working families,"[98] respectively. These are all examples that "there is something profoundly wrong," that "it's not fair," and "there is no justice" in America today. Adverbials used to describe the process were "unbelievably, and grotesquely" – in other words, this is the reality Sanders and his campaign want to change. Much of the references to the 1 percent are similar. A certain percentage of all the new income created goes to the top 1 percent; they own a higher percentage of the world wealth than another percentage, and so on.[99]

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[92] Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).
[93] "One Percent (Disambiguation)," in *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia* (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc, 2016).
[94] See APPENDIX III.
[95] See APPENDIX I.
[96] Bernie Sanders, "Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in Burlington, Vermont," (2015).
[97] "Prepared Remarks: Senator Bernie Sanders on Democratic Socialism in the United States," Bernie 2016, https://berniesanders.com/democratic-socialism-in-the-united-states/.
[98] "Remarks at the New Hampshire Democratic Party Convention in Manchester," in *The American Presidency Project* (2015).
[99] See APPENDIX I.

When researching social class discourse in the primary election, a good starting point can be looking at how the candidates apply the concept of class, not just thematically, but semantically – which different forms of "class" appear in the debates. We know that "middle class" is a favored term among American politicians: a positive focus on the middle class appeals to a broad selection of voters, as many Americans view themselves as middle class. The word "middle class" or "middle-class" appeared fifteen times in the first Democratic debate in Nevada[100], thirteen times in Iowa[101], eighteen times in New Hampshire[102], thirteen times in South Carolina[103] and ten times in the second New Hampshire-debate[104]. In general, when the word "class" shows up it is in reference to the middle class. In fact, the only exception to this rule so far in the Democratic debates has been from Bernie Sanders: he referred to the "working class" once in the first debate in Nevada and has otherwise made approximately one reference per debate to the new and very interesting "billionaire class."

The "billionaires" and the "billionaire class" are another term used to refer to the "they" Sanders' campaign is fighting against. Especially the billionaire class is a very interesting development, as it explicitly applies the term "class" to refer to the group. In other words, Sanders explicitly defines his campaign as class struggle against an elite class. Like his focus on economic capital in his opposition to the 1 percent, the term billionaire class also implies a focus on material conditions as basis of class belonging. The billionaire class is defined by their wealth – how they achieved that wealth or what other social or cultural capital they may have is irrelevant. In other words, he is placing himself in a Marxist tradition of class struggle. Furthermore, by choosing to focus on the billionaires, rather than "just" the millionaires, Sanders makes it clear that the elite minority he is taking on is not you or me. It is not even him or necessarily any of the other candidates. In fact, there are only 540 billionaires in the United States in 2016, up from 536 in 2015.[105]

[100] Presidential Candidates Debates, "Democratic Candidates Debate in Las Vegas, Nevada," (2015).
[101] "Democratic Candidates Debate in Des Moines, Iowa," (2015).
[102] "Democratic Candidates Debate in Manchester, New Hampshire," (2015).
[103] "Democratic Candidates Debate in Charleston, South Carolina," (2016).
[104] "Democratic Candidates Debate in Durham, New Hampshire," (2016).
[105] Kerry A. Dolan and Luisa Kroll, "Forbes 2016 World's Billionaires: Meet the Richest People on the Planet," Forbes, http://www.forbes.com/sites/luisakroll/2016/03/01/forbes-2016-worlds-billionaires-meet-the-richest-people-on-the-planet/#72a4b8f41cbf.

The idea is that something criminal has occurred. Wall Street and the billionaire class are "greedy" and "crooks," and they threw the United States into an economic crisis that affected "millions of Americans" without repercussions from the government – as happened, for example, in Iceland where 24 bankers were jailed. In fact, the government gave the banks large sums of money to stay afloat during the crisis – tax dollars paid by the average, middle class American. In other words, the government has been working in the interest of big money, rather than the people.

Furthermore, Sanders assigns specific actions and wants to the billionaire class. A recurring phrasing is that "the government belongs to all of us, not just the billionaire class," or "a handful of billionaires."[106] In other words, the billionaire class has been acting as if the government belongs to them, and now Sanders is setting the record straight. While the 1 percent is generally used to refer to wealth inequality, the billionaire class more often appears as the antagonist in the parts of the speeches where he talks about democracy. In his candidacy announcement speech in Burlington in May 2015, he describes how the billionaire class has corrupted the government with their money, and how the government has let them:

> *"the American political system has been totally corrupted, and the foundations of American democracy are being undermined. What the Supreme Court essentially said was that it was not good enough for the billionaire class to own much of our economy. They could now own the U.S. government as well. And that is precisely what they are trying to do."*[107]

In other words, the billionaire class and their activities represent a problem not only for economic equality, but for political equality. The American people have lost agency because the billionaire class is actively engaging in activities meant to protect their own position at the expense of the rest.

This is significant in many ways. First, it is anti-elitist – the focus is not primarily on the plight of the poor, but of the seemingly unrestrained power of the economic elite. Here, the discourse's roots in the discourse of the "overclass" from Linkon and Russo's study of 90s public class discourse becomes visible. The "99 percent" is too large a group to define meaningful commonalities, as it includes everyone from the poor to the

[106] See APPENDIX II.
[107] Sanders, "Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in Burlington, Vermont."

upper middle class. The focus becomes on the differences that meaningfully separate the "99 percent" from the "1 percent" – which is essentially that an elite minority has benefitted from policies and an economic and political system that favors them in the past 40 years, while the rest (the "99 percent") have been in decline. According to Standing's structure of seven classes of the global neoliberal economy, the elite are the class that, along with the plutocracy, "acts as the effective ruling class."[108] The plutocracy and elite differ in their ties to nation states – the plutocracy is a global elite, the elite "are national citizens somewhere."[109] The 1 percent and the billionaire class are the American versions of the elite of Standing, who, in addition to controlling most of the wealth in the country, also increasingly control the political process through campaign donations.

Second, and related to its anti-elitist nature, what the inequality discourse does is place focus on the elite as class, and their actions as class action. It emphasizes that the elite's political actions are a way for them to maintain their own interests and position at the expense of the rest of Americans. Nancy Mack's argument that in American social class discourse "the emotion of resentment is re-presented as the 'politics of envy,' 'class warfare,' and 'political correctness'"[110] is invalidated in the new discourse, as the ones who are being accused of class warfare are the elite. I outlined the beginnings of this element of the discourse in chapter 2 in the form of the "overclass" Linkon and Russo describe. This switch provides for a major challenge to the dominant individualistic discourse, as it is one of the strategies used to maintain it.

In the United States, the trend of an increasing influx of money into the election process has escalated with Citizens United. One of Sanders' main issues throughout this primary election has been campaign finance reform. He speaks about it in terms of policy change, wanting to revert "the disastrous Citizen United ruling," but he also leads by example. His "political revolution" is an attempt to mobilize enough people to win the nomination without the support of "big money" – an attempt to change the structure

[108] Standing, "O Precariado E a Luta De Classes." 2.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Mack, "Being the Namer or the Named: Working-Class Discourse Conflicts."

(and scale) of the democratic process by making sure that a candidate can "run for office without begging for contributions from the wealthy and the powerful."[111]

The case he is referring to is Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (2010) in which the Supreme Court decided that it was against the first amendment (freedom of speech) to limit donations by independent organizations, corporations, unions or other groups. By independent, they mean not officially tied to any electoral campaign. In other words, an independently formed organization can spend as much money as they wish supporting or going against a candidate that is up for election as long as they have no ties to the campaign itself. The decision led to the creation of so-called "super-PACs," which Sanders refuses to accept money from – gaining him credibility in his fight to end it.

What the Sanders campaign does, is make economic inequality a democratic problem – the American economy is in decline (long term rising income inequality and poverty rates) and crisis (the Financial Crisis in 2008 and following Great Recession) because a corrupt elite minority has disproportionate access to and influence on policy makers. He challenges the traditional discourse by making it about American democracy – about a corrupt elite that uses their influence to gain unfair advantage in affecting the political process and policy making. As to the question of how Wall Street, banks, corporations and the billionaire class have been able to conduct their "criminal" activities without proper repercussions, Bernie Sanders blames a "corrupt campaign finance system."[112] The issue of campaign finance is very important to social class matters because it has to do with moneyed influence on the electoral process. Hudson defines "the money election" as one of the eight major challenges to American democracy today, as "wealthy individuals and special interests gain unequal power because politicians depend on their contributions to gain office."[113]

While Sanders never mentions neoliberalism in so many words, the inequality he fights against is a result of neoliberal capitalism, and he implicitly criticizes it by claiming that the government and the economy are "rigged" to work for the wealthy.

[111] Bernie 2016, "Issues: Getting Big Money out of Politics and Restoring Democracy," https://berniesanders.com/issues/money-in-politics/.
[112] Sanders, "Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in Burlington, Vermont."
[113] Hudson, *American Democracy in Peril: Eight Challenges to America's Future*. Page 184.

"We need a government that works for all of us, not just" the 1 percent, the billionaire class. The billionaire class and the 1 percent are new names for the (financial and professional) elite that increasingly control the political process in the United States.

Opposition to the economic elite is central to the Sanders campaign. He has shown that he is not afraid of alienating the very rich, which is likely a part of the appeal of his campaign. The footing of the signature image for some of his campaign stickers read, "Paid for by Bernie 2016 (not the billionaires)."[114] The same text is in the footer of his campaign website.[115] Another example is from the 19 December Democratic debate in New Hampshire, where the ABC moderator asked if corporate America would love a President Sanders. The question was first directed to Hillary Clinton, whose answer included a combination of being tough on tax avoidance by the wealthy, while at the same time facilitating especially small business growth. Her short answer was, "everyone should." Sanders, on the other hand, answered with a simple, "No, I think they won't," followed by the assertion that Wall Street would probably like him even less.[116]

Sanders often refers to Wall Street in particular when naming who specifically is responsible for the financial crisis of 2007-8. The idea is that something criminal has occurred. The "greed, recklessness and illegal behavior of Wall Street"[117] threw the United States into an economic crisis that affected millions of Americans. They are "greedy" and "crooks," and their "business model is fraud."[118] In a speech in November 2015, he explains the need for reform by blatantly calling the current political system corrupt:

> *It is a system, for example, which during the 1990s allowed Wall Street to spend $5 billion in lobbying and campaign contributions to get deregulated. Then, ten years later, after the greed, recklessness, and illegal behavior of Wall Street led to their collapse, it is a system which provided trillions in government aid to bail them out. Wall Street used their wealth and power to get Congress to do their*

[114] See APPENDIX IIII.
[115] This has changed back and forth through the year, however. Acc. 2/17/2016 website, 4/17/2016 video.
[116] Debates, "Democratic Candidates Debate in Manchester, New Hampshire."
[117] Sanders, "Prepared Remarks: Senator Bernie Sanders on Democratic Socialism in the United States".
[118] "Remarks on Wall Street and the Economy in New York City," (2016).

bidding for deregulation and then, when their greed caused their collapse, they used their wealth and power to get Congress to bail them out. Quite a system![119]

Sanders frequently conflates the 1 percent, the billionaire class and Wall Street – all different versions of the "they" or the "other" his campaign is in opposition to. As seen in the quote above, however, his language is specifically harsh when referring to Wall Street. While the 1 percent and the billionaire class are more general terms, Wall Street refers specifically to the U.S. banking and finance industry – the banks that caused the financial crisis of 2007-8, and who then received money from the government in order to not collapse. This opposition to Wall Street specifically is one element that ties his campaign to the Occupy Wall Street movement, as I will discuss further below.

In his introduction to discourse analysis, Iver B. Neumann writes that "politics is conflict"[120] and that the discourse analyst focusing on politics should be on the lookout for stirrings, as they are often a sign that something new is happening, which is "met with different attempts of limitation by those who dominate the discourse."[121] Neumann refers to "formal and informal practices" used in order to maintain a certain discourse. In his study of social class discourse in the news media after Hurricane Katrina, for example, Zebroski shows how the conservative media turned the discourse back to its traditional form by emphasizing morality and personal responsibility – important elements of the dominant discourse that undermine the idea of government responsibility.[122] Another example is the recurring accusations of "class warfare."

I believe that part of the effectiveness of his campaign is that it is openly engaging in "class warfare" – a typical accusation of the right when someone brings up social class issues. However, rather than engaging in class warfare on behalf of the poor against the upper and even middle classes, Bernie Sanders is engaging in class warfare on behalf of all Americans (including himself) against a tiny elite that is perceived to be corrupt and oppressive. This goal has been clear from the very beginning of his campaign. Sanders has taken many of these terms that have been taboo in American

[119] "Prepared Remarks: Senator Bernie Sanders on Democratic Socialism in the United States".
[120] «Politikk er konflikt.» (52) My translation. Iver B. Neumann, "Kap 3: Tre Skritt: Avgrensning, Representasjoner, Lagdeling Og Vedlegg: Diskursanalysens Grunnbegreper," in *Mening, Materialitet, Makt. En Innføring I Diskursanalyse* (Fagbokforlaget, 2001).
[121] «…som møtes med forskjellige forsøk på begrensning fra dem som dominerer diskursen.» (52) My translation. Ibid.
[122] Zebroski, "Social Class as Discourse: Mapping the Landscape of Class in Rhetoric and Composition."

politics for a long time – class warfare, socialism – and embraced them. This rhetoric clearly speaks to many who feel as if they have no agency in the political system.

His speech of America's decline and broken system most often begins by invoking the thoughts and opinions of Americans who are beginning to recognize a truth that has been hidden from them – they have become disillusioned to the fact that they live in an unfair economic system that is sustained by a corrupt political system. In a January speech to his supporters in New York, he said that "The American people are catching on," and that "they understand that something is profoundly wrong."[123] He does the same in several of his introductory remarks in the Democratic debates as well: "most Americans understand that our country today faces a series of unprecedented crises,"[124] and he sees "people's concern that the economy we have is a rigged economy."[125]

By doing so, he establishes himself as the voice of a dissatisfied people – contributing to the perception of his (also outright spoken) agenda of being the leader of a political revolution, and establishing legitimacy. His is not the voice of special interest or after personal gain, but the voice of the American people, of a grassroots movement that is going to retake control of a government over which they feel they have lost influence. When he first announced his candidacy on 30 April 2015, he concluded his announcement with a clarification of his goal and role in achieving it:

> *After a year of travel, discussion and dialogue, I have decided to be a candidate for the Democratic nomination for President. But let's be clear. This campaign is not about Bernie Sanders. It's about a grassroots movement of Americans standing up and saying: "Enough is enough. This country and our government belong to all of us, not just a handful of billionaires."*[126]

In other words, what motivated his candidature (and I am repeating what he said, not assessing truth or motivation) was the discontent of many Americans with the feeling that the government is controlled by an elite which they do not have access to. There is an impression that government policies are made to benefit the very wealthy ("the billionaire class") rather than all Americans. The goal is for the average American to take back influence over government decisions, and they will achieve it through a

[123] Sanders, "Remarks on Wall Street and the Economy in New York City."
[124] Debates, "Democratic Candidates Debate in Las Vegas, Nevada."
[125] "Democratic Candidates Debate in Des Moines, Iowa."
[126] Bernie Sanders, "Statement Announcing Candidacy for President," (2015).

grassroots movement lead by Bernie Sanders, a US Senator with actual political power and electoral experience. During the official launch of the Bernie 2016 campaign in his hometown in May 2015, Sanders repeated himself: "Let's be clear. This campaign is not about Bernie Sanders […] This campaign is about the needs of the American people, and the ideas and proposals that effectively address those needs."[127]

Sanders and his grassroots movement are going to "send a message to the billionaire class," and "take on the billionaire class."[128] On how they are going to accomplish that, Sanders calls for a "political revolution," which in this case is a revolution that takes place in a non-democratic society in order to replace it with democracy. In other words, Sanders is implying that the United States is not a democracy, or at least not a well-functioning one. As described above, he says that explicitly as well, so his choice of words is not so surprising. In the Democratic debate in Iowa in November, Sanders said, "What my campaign is about is a political revolution -- millions of people standing up and saying, enough is enough. Our government belongs to all of us, and not just the hand full of billionaires"[129]

This thesis investigates strategies, and an interesting one is how his description of his campaign focuses on the issues and policies, not necessarily on getting him elected. He being elected would be a means to an end, not a goal in itself. Sanders' continued emphasis on his campaign as a movement and a revolution, and specifically not about Bernie Sanders the person, allows for a focus which will likely move beyond his (failed) candidacy. The election later this year will also include Congressional and local elections in which candidates supporting the fight against the economic and political inequality are likely to run. The momentum made by his campaign might contribute to the election of left-leaning politicians to Congress. This would provide less of a symbolic effect than having a self-declared socialist elected as President of the United States, but it would likely impact actual policymaking more, as it is Congress that passes bills – the president just signs them. In other words, by presenting his campaign as something more than just a campaign but as a movement and revolution, Sanders is applying a strategy that could have a more lasting impact on policymaking in the United States.

[127] "Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in Burlington, Vermont."
[128] See APPENDIX II.
[129] Debates, "Democratic Candidates Debate in Des Moines, Iowa."

The extra-linguistic elements of Sanders' speeches are also relevant to how they are received by viewers and listeners. One way in which Sanders distinguishes himself from the rest of the candidates is in the way he talks and gesticulates. Politicians, especially when running for office, tend to speak in a certain way – calm, controlled, and, most importantly, planned. Imagine President Obama giving a speech – his voice is deep, calm and controlled, authoritative yet always with a touch of friendliness. Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, Al Gore, Mitt Romney – they all speak in a certain way that we might call "presidential." The polished form is what people are used to, it is the norm. Bernie Sanders breaks with this norm, and comes across as more genuine for it. When he speaks at campaign rallies, he practically yells at the crowd, gesticulating for every other word. Simply put, he seems genuinely angry about the faults he finds with current politics and society. One *New York Times* op-ed columnist writes about Sanders: "He comes across as winningly uncalculated: Other candidates kiss babies; Sanders seems to fumble for a baby's 'off' switch so he can tell you more about inequality in America. Most politicos sweet-talk voters; he bellows at them."[130]

Furthermore, Sanders' yelling and gesticulating is a part of a larger rhetorical device which, whether calculated or not, has been noticed by voters and commentators alike. I have previously explained how the campaign is one that places the American people in opposition to a small elite of bankers and billionaires who have "destroyed the American economy." He makes it a question of morality and corruption, about the decay of American society. An article in *The Economist* on the socialism of Bernie Sanders writes that: "Sanders has built his campaign on a jeremiad against wealth inequality and corporate greed."[131] The Jeremiad "was a sermon, a 'subtle exploration of the labyrinth of sin and regeneration', usually delivered with the purpose of gathering and binding community together."[132] Throughout American history it has become secularized as a rhetorical form used to describe how far America had come or moved away from its purpose but has remained its sermon-like form.

Sanders also to a certain degree places himself in the tradition of President Obama, although less explicitly than with Roosevelt and Johnson, which I will discuss further in

[130] Nicholas Kristof, "2 Questions for Bernie Sanders," *The New York Times*, Feb 4th 2016.
[131] S. M., "The Bernie Manifesto: How Much of a Socialist Is Sanders?," *The Economist*, Feb 1st 2016.
[132] Andreas Hess, *American Social and Political Thought: A Consise Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2000). 22.

chapter 4. His slogan "real change" is a play on Obama's 2008 "change" and "change we can believe in" slogans, indicating that he will deliver where Obama did not. Already during the primary election in 2008, Obama placed focus on campaign finance reform. He wanted to end the dependency on "big-moneyed interests" in electoral politics, and, significantly, was the first who used the model of internet crowdfunding – relying on many small donations – in a presidential election.[133] However, Obama did accept large donations from banks and corporations, which would later discredit him somewhat on the issue. Obama was in favor of campaign finance reform, but believed that it would be impossible to be elected without following the current rules of the game (which was gaining as much financial support from wealthy benefactors as possible). Bernie Sanders has decided to lead by example instead, by refusing super PACs entirely.

In many ways, his supporters and certain parts of the media considers Sanders to be in a position to fulfill Obama's unfulfilled promises. In a February 2016 article from the BBC, referring to closing the gap between decision makers in Washington and the public they represent, phrases the connection between Sanders and Obama like this: "It is a revolution that some may have thought Mr Obama would usher in, instead of the progressive-tinted pragmatism that his presidency represented."[134] In other words, Obama's presidency proved to be disappointingly moderate and pragmatic – in contrast to his campaign which promised both "hope" and "change," and which inspired young people and minorities to participate in the democratic process. In general, Sanders gains credibility from his lack of dependency on the billionaire class he fights against and the authenticity with which he seems to campaign.

Sanders' calls for revolution against Wall Street and the billionaires rings of Occupy Wall Street back in 2011. In his April 2015 article "The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street," Hammond wrote about Occupy Wall Street: "Those who called on it to take on electoral campaigns or political reform were asking it to be a different movement."[135] In the same month as the article was published, Senator Bernie Sanders announced his candidature for the Democratic presidential primaries, stating,

[133] Jeff Zeleny, "Obama Wants Reforms in Campaign Financing," *The New York Times*, 11 April 2008.
[134] Anthony Zurcher, "Bernie Sanders Capitalises on Anti-Obama Sentiment," *BBC*, 20 February 2016.
[135] John L. Hammond, "The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street," *Science & Society* 79, no. 2 (2015). 309.

"This campaign is not about Bernie Sanders. It's about a grassroots movement of Americans standing up and saying: 'Enough is enough. This country and our government belong to all of us, not just a handful of billionaires.'"[136]

For the remainder of the chapter, I will outline the relationship between the Occupy Wall Street movement and the Bernie Sanders campaign.

The Occupy Wall Street movement began in Zuccotti Park in New York on 17 September 2011. According to Hudson, "at the core of the movement was a concern largely ignored and papered over in the mainstream culture – rising economic inequality in America."[137] The Occupy Wall street movement, while criticized for a general lack of leadership and common cause, gave (especially young) people a language through which they could make sense of the economic inequality they saw and experienced, and the dissonance between the articulated promise of America and their real life experiences.

> *"Though Occupy Wall Street deliberately abstained from conventional political activism, it nevertheless influenced that process by focusing political discourse on inequality, opening up political space for other actors to press for reforms."*[138]

The political space Hammond is referring to was the space in which Sanders could run for president as successfully as he has – assuming that a self-declared socialist would normally not make it as far as Sanders has done.

The most obvious connection between Bernie Sanders and Occupy Wall Street is their shared enemy. I have outlined above how Sanders' campaign is in opposition to an elite that has taken control of American democracy. According to Hudson, "The anger of Occupy Wall Street protesters derives partly from shock that, in the view of the protesters, a plutocratic elite has hijacked American democracy."[139] This elite is viewed as engaging in "class warfare" against everyone else, and especially the poor and working classes.

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[136] Sanders, "Statement Announcing Candidacy for President."
[137] Hudson, *American Democracy in Peril: Eight Challenges to America's Future*. 263.
[138] Hammond, "The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street."
[139] Hudson, *American Democracy in Peril: Eight Challenges to America's Future*. 265.

The Occupy Wall Street "Declaration of the Occupation of New York City" from 2011 refers to the perceived perpetrators as simply "they" [140] in their long list of grievances styled after the Declaration of Independence from 1776 which repeatedly refers to the king as "he." The stylistic similarity is blatant and significant – just as the British king had oppressed the American colonists, so is now the undefined elite (however, we can make guesses based on the grievances listed) oppressing Americans. They place themselves in an American revolutionary tradition, effectively drawing on the very foundation of American democracy. Interestingly, President Roosevelt drew on this tradition as well, by calling the economic elite of his day "economic royalists"[141] – in other words equating them with British sympathizers during the American Revolution.

Several people who were involved in the Occupy movement are now actively supporting Bernie Sanders through the People for Bernie organization. The People for Bernie movement is a grassroots movement, not under the control of the Sanders campaign, but "guided" by it.[142] Stan Williams, who provided logistical support to Occupy Wall Street, is now the lead organizer for African Americans for Bernie, a grouping of the organization People for Bernie.[143] Winnie Wong is an ex-Occupy activist and co-founder of People for Bernie.[144] A note by the current Occupy Wall Street Facebook page argued for supporting Sanders in the New York primaries. They wrote that they understood that people might not want to support the Democratic Party, but that they could register, vote for Sanders, and then deregister after they had cast their vote. They write that, "At this time, electing Bernie Sanders is the best shot we have to jumpstart a long process of transformational change, begun in Zuccotti Park, that will involve redistributing power, resources, and support from the 1% to everyone else."[145] While several Occupiers likely do not support Sanders and might not even wish

[140] NYC General Assembly, "Declaration of the Occupation of New York City," in *Occupy Wall Street* (New York2011).
[141] Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Acceptance Speech for the Renomination for the Presidency, Philadelphia, Pa.," (1936).
[142] Arit John, "For Occupy Wall Street Alums, Sanders Just a Means to Their Own Ends," *Bloomberg Politics*, 15 April 2016.
[143] "Bios," The People for Bernie, http://www.peopleforbernie.com/about.
[144] "For Occupy Wall Street Alums, Sanders Just a Means to Their Own Ends."
[145] Occupy Wall St to Facebook, 20 March, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/notes/occupy-wall-st/if-voting-didnt-change-anything/1100085103392586.

to participate in the political process, it is clear that many also see him as a furthering of their fight against inequality and lack of agency in the political process.

This includes commentators on the outside as well. In an article for *The Atlantic* in June 2010, Michael Levitin wrote about the success of Occupy Wall Street and the general influence they had had on American political discourse as well as the primary election:

"Nearly four years after the precipitous rise of Occupy Wall Street, the movement so many thought had disappeared has instead splintered and regrown into a variety of focused causes. Income inequality is the crisis du jour—a problem that all 2016 presidential candidates must grapple with because they can no longer afford not to."[146]

In other words, Occupy Wall Street and the 99 Percent movement succeeded in creating a language through which Americans understood their situation. Now they demand that politicians deal address the issue.

Many of Sanders' supporters are militantly in favor of Sanders while generally against the Democratic Party or any "establishment" politician. They refuse to accept defeat, blaming the system (Bernie blackout, rigged voting system etc.) if Bernie does not do well. The hashtag #bernieorbust (meaning that Sanders supporters will not vote for any other democratic candidate) has caused a lot of friction between Sanders and Clinton supporters (and within the Democratic Party), and is cause for disagreement between Sanders supporters themselves. This is perhaps where their ties to Occupy and their being a grassroots movement is most visible: they are not just Democrats preferring Sanders over Clinton, they are a movement seeking to fundamentally transform the political system and its institutions. Their presidential candidate was an Independent until recently, so his ties to the Democratic Party are also precarious. They are committed to the political revolution Sanders says he is fighting for, and falling into line to vote for whichever candidate, from their perspective, moneyed interests choose for them is not an option.

The legacy of Occupy is a language through which many Americans can conceptualize their social class experiences. In this year's election, the Occupy message

[146] Michael Levitin, "The Triumph of Occupy Wall Street," *The Atlantic*, June 10 2015.

has been translated into political action through the campaign of Senator Sanders, who also supported Occupy's message when they first gathered. The connection is discursive, as seen in Sanders' language, and it is literal, as seen in the People for Bernie organizers, many of them previous Occupy activists, who see it as a continuation of their cause and the general support of his campaign from the current Occupy network.

The renewed awareness of class matters and economic inequality in the United States have had its material roots in the slow growing class divide and poverty levels – an ongoing development since the 1970s – and the sudden 2008 Financial Crisis, which led to the worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. That material situation is reflected in the studies by Emmanuel Suez and others from 2003 and onwards, which revealed the ever-increasing gap between the top 1 percent and the rest. Those numbers slowly entered the public and political discourse, culminating in the sudden explosion of usage by the Occupy Wall Street movement and their social media counterpart in the 99 Percent movement. "We are the 99 Percent" resonated with people's experiences, and now the 1 percent and 99 percent (and other percentages) are common terms in American political discourse.

The new discourse of inequality should be understood in the context of reappearance (or strengthening) of the left in American politics. In Chapter 2, I argue that American economic and social class discourse have been dominated by the right since the presidency of Ronald Reagan. This was also reflected in economic policies (deregulatory financial policies), where there has been a convergence between Republicans and Democrats in Congress – significantly, in a period generally characterized as one with increasing polarization between the two parties.

It should also be understood in the context of the crisis of neoliberal capitalism as explained by Fairclough. The inequality discourse challenges the neoliberal agenda by demanding economic inequality and especially by making economic inequality an issue of political inequality. The 99 percent – or the people who choose to see themselves as the 99 percent – want to reclaim government from the elite whose wealth is seen as damaging to democracy because they use it to influence policymaking. Now the 99 percent demand control of their government back, and they wish to use it to reinstate redistributive policies, which the neoliberal agenda wanted to remove in the

first place. Furthermore, through campaign finance reform, they wish to remove the special influence the elite have on policymaking. Doing so would make the government more responsive to the will of the majority of the people rather than lobbyists and campaign donors, which might further stand in the way of the neoliberal agenda.

In this chapter, I have identified some of the main elements of the inequality discourse of Bernie Sanders and Occupy Wall Street, which is defined by its opposition to an elite class that is conceptualized as the 1 percent, the billionaire class or Wall Street. Especially characteristic of the inequality discourse is its percentage talk, which is used to illustrate economic inequality and which redefines class lines between the 1 percent on top, and the remaining 99 percent on the bottom. The inequality discourse combines the strands social class and democracy, framing social class issues as democratic issues. The 1 percent and the billionaire class do not only own a large part of the economy, they are also controlling the democratic process through election funding and lobbying. This process is cast as amoral and criminal, which is seen in the adjectives used to describe the 1 percent and the billionaire class. The inequality discourse is not only about economic inequality, but political inequality as well. The inequality discourse is a strategy against the crisis of neoliberal capitalism in the sense that it frames economic inequality as an inherent problem, as well as a democratic problem, and trying to regain control over the democratic process. Furthermore, the increase in class-consciousness, if mainly in the sense that a majority opposes an elite minority, could lead to the further breaking down of the neoliberal system by a continued fight for redistributive policies and campaign finance reform beyond the campaign of Bernie Sanders.

4 The New Deal and Roosevelt

In the previous chapter, I detailed the increasing class-consciousness in the United States as it relates to the new discourse of inequality, as represented by the Bernie Sanders campaign and Occupy Wall Street. I argued that the new conceptualization of social class that it contains, one that emphasizes collective agency in opposition to a powerful elite, can be interpreted as a strategy in response to the crisis of neoliberal capitalism. In this chapter, I would like to address a different aspect of this strategy. The previous chapter framed the discourse as new, by emphasizing it as a response to a contemporary crisis (the financial crisis of 2007-8 and following Great Recession) and new data that shows that income inequality and poverty rates has increased in the past few decades. In this chapter, however, I will direct my attention towards what elements of the strategy are old, both historically and more recent (pre-crisis). Bernie Sanders explicitly[147] places himself in the tradition of President Franklin D. Roosevelt who became president in 1933, at the height of the Great Depression, and who famously introduced the New Deal – governmental programs establishing jobs and social services to rehabilitate the crippled economy. As a solution to the problems he sees facing America today, Sanders presents a previous approach to a similar problem from American history – before the rise of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism sees government action as unwanted interference with the market (unless the goal is to further facilitate market growth) and infringing on people's freedom. "New Deal socialism," however, sees government as a tool through which to achieve its goals. This dichotomy is seen in the different conceptualizations of the American Dream outlined in chapter 2 as well, and in this chapter, I will outline Sanders' version of the Dream, which falls more in the tradition of Roosevelt, Johnson and Obama.

Commentators tend to describe the world's contemporary economic problems in reference to the Great Depression. The crisis was "the biggest since the Great Depression," "since the 1930s." Even the naming of the crisis' impact on the world economy derives from this historical event – the Great Recession. A recession is when the market is in a period of negative growth, while a depression is a longer and more serious recession. In American history, the story of the Great Depression is told like

[147] Sanders, "Prepared Remarks: Senator Bernie Sanders on Democratic Socialism in the United States".

this: the 1920s saw major economic growth under a laissez faire style economy, which came to an abrupt halt in October 1929, when the market and banks crashed. The country went into a Great Depression – millions were unemployed and homeless, and children were starving. Then, in 1933, President Roosevelt was elected and introduced the New Deal, a program that would reinvigorate the American economy and bring people out of poverty. What finally ended the Great Depression was the economic stimulus caused by World War II, but Roosevelt is still remembered as a popular president who took over a country in crisis and led it out of it.[148] In other words, Sanders positions himself as using a tried and tested approach to solve a crisis with precedence in American history. Furthermore, he is placing his policies (and candidacy), which from the beginning of his campaign were perceived as radical to the point of being unheard of, in the tradition of a well-respected American president. This is the more respectable counterpoint to the previous chapter's interpretation of Sanders as the radical leader of a grassroots movement (with ties to anarchist protesters) on its way to a political revolution.

Sanders begins his November 19 speech to Georgetown University, where he defends his position as a "democratic socialist," by referring directly to President Roosevelt's second inaugural address from 1937. Asking the question of how far they had come in the last four years, Roosevelt began by listing positive changes. Then, emphasizing how much there was still to be done; Roosevelt listed the challenges facing the nation in rapid succession:

> *"I see millions of families trying to live on incomes so meager […] I see millions whose daily lives in city and on farm continue under conditions labeled indecent by a so-called polite society half a century ago […] I see millions denied education, recreation, and the opportunity to better their lot and the lot of their children…"*[149]

And so he continues. Sanders repeats the use of anaphora in his speech, only slightly paraphrasing the content of the original speech: "He saw millions of families trying to live on incomes so meager"[150] and so on, ending with the sentence: "And he acted."[151]

[148] Paul S. Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*, 6th ed. (Canada: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2010). 562-575
[149] Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Inaugural Address," (1937).
[150] Sanders, "Prepared Remarks: Senator Bernie Sanders on Democratic Socialism in the United States".
[151] Ibid.

Sanders continues describing the ways in which Roosevelt acted, finally concluding that "that is what we have to do today."[152]

While I have introduced Sanders' ties with Roosevelt and the New Deal in opposition to the more radical elements discussed in the previous chapter, his call for government action on behalf of the people against a corrupt elite that has taken their power too far is another thing they have in common. In his first inaugural address, Roosevelt used the metaphor of "painting a picture" of the current situation of the nation – in which the "evils of the old order" and "standards of pride of place and personal profit" have led to "callous and selfish wrongdoing."[153] It is a picture painted "in hope," however, "because the Nation, seeing and understanding the injustice in it, proposes to paint it out." Like Sanders, his legitimacy came from the people: "This Nation asks for action, and action now."[154] In other words, Roosevelt is moved into action by the will of the people.

At this point, I will revisit the topic of the American Dream – this time to illustrate how Sanders applies it for his vision of America. Rowland and Jones write, "The core rhetorical principle at the heart of the American Dream is the idea that Americans are on a progressive journey to a better society, a journey energized […] 'the ability to overcome the past'."[155] In other words, the American Dream is a narrative of envisioning a national future that is better than the past. Sanders uses this rhetorical device in his final few minutes during his candidacy announcement in May 2015, after a long speech in which he has verbally attacked the billionaires and more generally outlined his specific policies. He begins with a story of his upbringing: his immigrant father who arrived penniless and uneducated in America, his New York mother who dreamed of a bigger apartment but not living to see her dream come true. The setting is a classic American Dream narrative, emphasized by his repetitive usage of the word "dream" in referring to his mother. The dream-part of the speech begins with him saying he was born in Brooklyn, a "far-away land" – further indicating that he is about

[152] Ibid.
[153] Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Inaugural Address," (1933).
[154] Ibid.
[155] Robert C. Rowland and John M. Jones, "Recasting the American Dream and American Politics: Barack Obama's Keynote Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 93, no. 4 (2007).

to embark on a story. He never once explicitly calls it the American Dream, but repeats the word "dream" five times in four short paragraphs.

Having grown up to become a Senator, and even running for president, Sanders says that he has "seen the promise of America in my own life." However, despite his own success, he continues by reminding the listeners that many Americans are denied the dream. Income inequality – "the grind of an economy that funnels all the wealth to the top" – is what is standing in the way of their "dream of progress and opportunity." In other words, he is saying that the current system which is causing income and wealth inequality is standing in the way of the American Dream. The elite is taking it away from the rest of the people. That is the picture Sanders paints of the current situation in America. In his inaugural, Roosevelt said, "It is not in despair that I paint you that picture. I paint it for you in hope—because the Nation, seeing and understanding the injustice in it, proposes to paint it out."[156] So does Sanders continue his dream narrative by painting a hopeful future.

Sanders' vision for America and the revival of the dream includes five points. Those are "health care as a right, not a privilege,"[157] affordable childcare and college, "dignity and security"[158] for seniors, and helping veterans. Finally, he says it is possible to create a country in which "every person, no matter their race, their religion, their disability or their sexual orientation realizes the full promise of equality that is our birthright as Americans."[159] In other words, Sanders is recasting the American Dream as one in which government is responsible for securing it. His progressive vision to overcome the past, in this setting, includes a series of policies expanding welfare provisions for different parts of the population. Significantly, he also defines "the full promise of equality" as an American "birthright."[160]

Bernie Sanders is not the first contemporary politician to bring back the old government friendly version of the American dream. His discourse builds on the momentum made by the developments through the 1990s and 2000s discussed in chapter 2, as well as Obama's version from 2004. Jones and Rowland write in their

[156] Roosevelt, "Inaugural Address."
[157] Sanders, "Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in Burlington, Vermont."
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.

article about the American Dream, "While over the last twenty-five years one fundamental thing has changed; it has become strongly associated with conservatism as a political ideology and consequently has aided the Republican party."[161] They are referring to the individualistic redefinition by Reagan in his 1981 inaugural address. Further, they argue that then Senator Obama once again recast the American Dream in his 2004 Democratic Convention speech, which is what catapulted him onto the national stage, positioning him for his 2008 presidential bid:

"This version of the American Dream was associated with the progressive policies of liberal Republican Teddy Roosevelt, and even more strongly with those of his cousin Franklin and FDR's successor Harry Truman. Today, a change in narrative allegiance could produce a major reshuffling of the American political system."[162]

Obama's vision of the American Dream combined individualistic and collective elements, which Rowland and Jones argue could contribute to a shift in American policies: "it reflects a fundamental recasting of the dream narrative toward a greater focus on community values and potentially a recasting of American politics as well."[163]

Rowland and Jones implicitly interpret Obama as opposing neoliberalism. They write refer to the increasing inequality and lack of welfare provisions in the United States in the past few decades by writing, "nearly all the income gains have gone only to those already quite well-off."[164] They suggest that "Obama's community-oriented recasting of the American Dream may have particular power" in a time when "many good jobs have been lost to overseas competitors or to down-sizing, and health care costs have risen dramatically while millions have lost health insurance."[165] That was in reference to the slow rise in inequality. The sudden crash in 2007-8 and following Recession made those issues much more visible and urgent.

The specific policies Sanders' introduces to go fight the inequality he sees are a combination of redistributive policies that are largely social democratic. Some of them come directly from Roosevelt's New Deal, and other seem to be inspired more by the Scandinavian model. I will outline some of the policies Sanders wants to implement,

[161] Rowland and Jones, "Recasting the American Dream and American Politics: Barack Obama's Keynote Address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention." 427.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.443.
[164] Ibid. 442-3.
[165] Ibid.

and then discuss them as strategies of redistribution against the inequality caused by neoliberal capitalism. For the discussion I will draw on some of Standing's theorizing about what effective redistributive policies would be in a 21st century setting, in which the lowest active class is the precariat rather than the old proletariat.

The welfare states of Western Europe are the envy of American leftists – Sanders regularly brings up the social democracies of Scandinavia as a vision of the potential and proof of the validity of his policies. However, in their essay on neoliberalism and its part in the rise of Islamism, Hylland Eriksen and Vetlesen write that the neoliberal worldview has become a part of contemporary Western European society. They write, "instead of creating new jobs, the government offers job application courses. In other words, it encourages individual competition in pursuit of a limited commodity instead of making it available for everyone."[166] This is an example of the ubiquity of neoliberalism – it seeps into all domains, even the welfare state.

When Bernie Sanders, as president Roosevelt did in response to the Great Depression, says he is going to start government projects that will create jobs for people – literally "create and maintain" jobs – he is placing himself in a pre-neoliberal welfare tradition. Rather than using or manipulating the market, he proposes direct action. Rather than influencing or incentivizing growth in the private sector, he proposes the "Rebuild America Act, to invest $1 trillion over five years to modernize our infrastructure."[167] The goal is to create 13 million "good-paying jobs"[168] as well as updating the infrastructure, including the electrical grid, broadband access, roads, railroads which will further benefit the public. In order to pay for this, he wants to raise taxes on the wealthy and remove loopholes that currently allow them to pay less than "their fair share."[169] In addition to this the Rebuild America Act, Sanders wants to

[166] Eriksen and Vetlesen, "Nyliberalismens Ektefødte Barn." My translation: «I stedet for å skape nye arbeidsplasser, tilbyr staten jobbsøkerkurs. Den oppmuntrer altså til individuell konkurranse om et knapt gode i stedet for å gjøre godet tilgjengelig for alle.»
[167] Bernie 2016, "Issues: Creating Jobs Rebuilding America," https://berniesanders.com/issues/creating-jobs-rebuilding-america/.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Sanders, "Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in Burlington, Vermont."

implement a youth employment program to create 1 million jobs for disadvantaged young people.[170]

In other words, his form of "democratic socialism" is that of New Deal liberalism which predates the neoliberal political project (it, and especially its European social democracy counterparts, was what the neoliberal agenda was first developed as reform against). The modern social democracies of Europe are infused by market principles, as exemplified by Hylland Eriksen and Vetlesen above. While he does refer to Scandinavian countries as examples of well-functioning social democracies, his actual policies are much more similar to the New Deal. In this sense, his campaign is a much clearer challenge to neoliberalism, as he would also reject the neoliberal elements of those Scandinavian countries. As we shall see in a moment, Sanders' approach involves effectively deconstructing the neoliberal state bit by bit.

The antagonism against the elite is visible in his policies and their wording as well. On how he is going to pay for all the programs, he wants to tax the wealthy "their fair share."[171] In other words, he believes that they are currently not paying what they are due, which is part of the reason why the United States is currently unable to provide public goods for its remaining citizens. Specifically, they include higher estate taxes and a tax on Wall Street speculators, the latter "who caused millions of Americans to lose their jobs, homes, and life savings."[172] Further actions against the finance sector involve breaking up large financial institutions. He has repeated several times that he wants to put an end to "too big to fail,"[173] which is a reference to the reasoning behind the government bailout after the financial crisis. If the government had allowed the banks to crash without helping them, it would destroy the economy even more. They were, in other words, too big to fail without major unwanted consequences.

Some of his more typically labor policies he wants to implement directly. These involve raising the minimum wage nationwide, and forcing employers to guarantee a certain amount of sick days and family and medical leave for their employees. Additionally, he wants to strengthen the unions through the Employee Free Choice Act

[170] Bernie 2016, "Issues: Income and Wealth Inequality," https://berniesanders.com/issues/income-and-wealth-inequality/.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Sanders, "Remarks on Wall Street and the Economy in New York City."

so that workers can regain their bargaining tool against their employers. His reasoning for this last one is interesting as it is another implicit criticism of neoliberalism and its consequences: "One of the most significant reasons for the 40-year decline in the middle class is that the rights of workers to collectively bargain for better wages and benefits have been severely undermined."[174] Neoliberalism's individualist and anti-collective agenda has negatively affected workers' ability to organize – a situation Sanders wants to remedy.

Another aspect of neoliberalism's rescaling of society according to its free market principles is free trade agreements between countries. Sanders opposes especially the United States' trade agreements with China and other countries, as they have made it easier for American industries to move their manufacturing abroad, effectively leaving many Americans unemployed.[175] This is what people are talking about when they refer to the outsourcing of American jobs overseas. He also opposes the new TPP agreement between the United States and the Pacific Rim countries for the same reasons. In general, he opposes the globalization of markets as they negatively affect the traditional working class by moving manufacturing to countries with lower wages (or the old proletariat, as I will come back to discussing further down).

His other policies include providing free healthcare, pre-kindergarten options, free public college education, expanding Social Security, and fighting for equal pay for women.[176] In other words, public goods generally provided by modern European (especially Scandinavian) welfare states. These policies work against economic inequality by adding removing expenses that current lower and middle class people and families have to cover themselves to a large degree, and by taxing the rich to pay for them. Furthermore, he emphasizes all these elements as a right, not a privilege. That is significant, as it shifts the view of welfare from charity to a collective obligation.

Sanders' approach is labor /social democratic. He calls himself a democratic socialist, which means he wants a socialist government but by democratic means. He wants a strong government which regulates finance and business, with a high and progressive tax rate, free health care and higher education, strong unions, and other

[174] 2016, "Issues: Income and Wealth Inequality".
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid.

public goods. Sanders' ties with labor are as long as his career in politics. In his speech to the AFL-CIO he continuously refers to the listeners as "brothers and sisters,"[177] positioning himself as more than an ally – more of a fellow member of the union or comrade.

In a 1998 debate on C-span, he spoke in a way very similar to today, minus the percentage talk especially. But his ties to labor were clear. He wanted to "represent the interests of working Vermonters," and "help middle class and working families," not give "tax cuts to billionaires."[178]

"The average Vermonter is working longer hours for smaller wages than was the case 20 years ago. What we have got to do is make the economy work for the middle class and working families, not just for the people on top."[179]

In this sense, Sanders has been working on the same message for a long time. Occupy Wall Street, as seen in the previous chapter, simply contributed with providing a space in which he could run for election. Otherwise, his language and policies reveal his ties to unions and laborism whose political project of establishing redistributive policies is longstanding and typical of laborism.

Sanders often repeats that he is not in the pockets of millionaires, billionaires, Wall Street, or corporations , and his grassroots campaign style in many ways confirms his stance on money in elections: as a corruptive force. However, simply because he is not involved with the common political benefactors, does not mean he is without backers or interests. Several unions, amongst them National Nurses United, have endorsed Sanders for president, and some of his main financial contributors beyond his own campaign fundraiser are unions. Sanders spoke at their Nevada State Convention in August 2015. His speech was clearly an appeal for support, and through it, Sanders made it clear that he considered himself an ally. Eight times in the course of his speech, he addressed the convention as "brothers and sisters," including to begin his opening statement.[180]

[177] Bernie Sanders, "Remarks at the Nevada State Afl-Cio Constitutional Convention in Las Vegas," in *The American Presidency Project* (2015).
[178] Peoples War to YouTube, 21 August, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CHlltRXP8.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Sanders, "Remarks at the Nevada State Afl-Cio Constitutional Convention in Las Vegas."

There are two main ways to look at those ties: one is that the unions are just another example of special interest putting their money into supporting a candidate in the hopes of later benefits – in other words, not much different from banks, corporations or other moneyed interests in an election. Another point of view sees unions as a representative for the working classes, protecting their interests against the corporate interests of their employers – as a way for the many who do not possess enough power in their own right to be heard in the election and policymaking processes. In my point of view, a combination of the two is true. Unions are meant to represent the interest of their members – workers of different professions and status, who pay a membership fee in return for unity and backing in for example salary negotiations with employers. Their power is in their numbers, the more people taken out for a strike, for example, the stronger the impact and the more likely that the employer will have to back down or settle for a compromise. In addition, there is a lobby aspect to unions, who often support candidates and political parties who are union-friendly, and generally advance policies that better conditions for workers, i.e. security measure regulation, higher minimum wage, and maximum working hours per day. Problems of representation emerge, however, when the union leadership removes itself too far from the membership body to be able to or want to pursue their interests – when they become a part of the elite against which they should balance.

Many of Sanders' policies represent a return to one of the dominant systems before neoliberalism made its influence on policymaking and its restructuring of markets and society. The New Deal involved direct action by government in creating jobs for the unemployed, as well as rebuilding the American infrastructure. This is exactly what Sanders wants to do – fight unemployment by creating work. Standing, in his call for class and political action to prompt redistributive policies to fight the inequality inherent in the neoliberal economy, argues that a return to New Deal liberalism (or laborism in the United Kingdom) would not be effective in awakening class action from the precariat. This is because their policies are designed for the old proletariat. In other words, the inequalities caused by a neoliberal global economy cannot be properly addressed with a return to policies meant to help the condition of workers:

"Paradoxically but appropriately, in the midst of a crisis due to the failings of the neo-liberal project, old-style social democrats have lost their constituency base and are hit by the growth of the precariat more than any other political stream. The social democrats seem to offer a return to the past, without realising that the core of the precariat is alienated from that as well."[181]

In other words, appealing to the precariat through the New Deal and labor policies might not be effective. As we saw in chapter 2, the precariat can be divided into three parts, the last of which has potential to be a transformative class. These are the "bohemians" or potential progressives – they are educated, but their economic situation is precarious. Remedying their problems by creating manual labor jobs seems unfitting for their situation. In other words, Standing judges New Deal liberalism and laborism as an outdated solution to a new problem. In this sense, he might fail to reach essential parts of his potential electoral base because the language of workers, labor, and unions might not appeal to their experiences.

Many young and educated people are supporting him, however. Perhaps this is because it has been a long time since there was a proper labor alternative in the United States. Standing is referring to a global class system, but his position is from a European perspective in which labor is just as establishment as any other political alternative. What Americans are sick of in this election is the establishment, and in the United States that does not involve labor. Together with the popularity of Roosevelt and Sanders' drawing on Occupy discourse, his outsider status might explain his popularity.

The way in which the inequality discourse of the Sanders campaign truly functions as a strategy against neoliberalism is in the language it provides. Both in the powerful message of the 99 Percent and in Sanders' collectivist version of the American Dream, is the language of hope for the future. Standing writes:

"One achievement of neoliberalism was a degree of linguistic hegemony in capturing the language of political, social and economic discourse, extending into cultural discourse as well. A challenge today is to recapture the language, so as to create an imagined desirable future."[182]

This challenge has been answered in the United States today. The question remains to see how far it will go. Sanders has effectively lost the bid for the Democratic

[181] Standing, "O Precariado E a Luta De Classes." 5.
[182] Ibid. 6.

nomination, but the inequality discourse and the class-consciousness and continued will for political action within the different branches of the Occupy movement indicates that the message will live on.

The general attitude and self-conception of this year's primary election is one of disruptiveness and historical significance. Historical significance in the sense that each candidate represented some kind of "first" – the first woman president, the first socialist or Jewish president, the first Latino president, following in the footsteps of the first black president in Obama. Disruptiveness in the sense of Sanders' political revolution, and also the rise of Donald Trump.

Both the Democratic and Republican parties' nomination processes have reflected a discontent, or even anger, from the American working classes about their economic situation and prospects for the future. Donald Trump on the Republican side and Bernie Sanders on the Democratic side have represented voters discontent with "establishment politics" and "same old same old" – with varying success. Writing in May 2016, Donald Trump has won the nomination for Republican candidate with a majority of delegates, and all the other candidates have dropped out of the race. Bernie Sanders, on the other hand, appears to have finally lost the Democratic nomination to Hillary Clinton. Sanders has said he will continue his campaign all the way to the Democratic Convention in late July – his is, after all, an attempt at a political revolution – but his chances of taking the nomination are effectively nonexistent.

This year's election was surprising and somewhat of a wakeup call for many. No one believed Donald Trump would win the nomination less than a year ago. Last fall he was still being treated as a joke by the media and political commentators, believing his candidacy was a PR stunt of some kind, or at least that he would be unsuccessful. But Trump's message resonated with the part of the population that are as disillusioned as Sanders supporters with establishment politics, but who view the solution to the problem differently. Commentators are beginning to look at their assumptions about social class in America in response to the surprising and unusual primary election process. David Brooks, in a *New York Times* opinion article, wrote the following at the end of April this year:

"We'll probably need a new national story. Up until now, America's story has been some version of the rags-to-riches story, the lone individual who rises from the bottom through pluck and work. But that story isn't working for people anymore, especially for people who think the system is rigged.

I don't know what the new national story will be, but maybe it will be less individualistic and more redemptive. Maybe it will be a story about communities that heal those who suffer from addiction, broken homes, trauma, prison and loss, a story of those who triumph over the isolation, social instability and dislocation so common today."[183]

In response to the shock of Trump's popularity, there was a sense amongst political commentators that they had gotten it all wrong, and that there was much more anger, discontent and alienation among the lower classes than they had thought.

In this chapter, I have presented some of Sanders' ties with Roosevelt, and demonstrated his strategy of positioning himself in the footsteps of a popular president who is viewed as having responded correctly to a crisis similar to what we see today. I have also elaborated some on Sanders' ties with laborism and unions, which are much longer than his ties to Occupy. This would be natural as the Occupy movement started in 2011, but my point is that he appears to have deeper, more natural bonds with unions, as reflected in his repetitive use of "brothers and sisters" to address them. I have also described Sanders' American Dream narrative and placed it in the tradition of Obama's 2004 speech that contributed to the recasting of the dream back into its collectivist roots. As a strategy against the consequences of neoliberal capitalism, one of which is the formation of a new class in the form of the precariat, Sanders returns to New Deal liberalism. This was one of the social democratic rationales for government that neoliberalism originally was developed in opposition to. Standing argues that a return to laborism or New Deal policies does not effectively address the current problems facing the precariat. I agree with him to a certain extent, but also argue that in an American setting, labor has the potential to be more popular among the precariat because of their longs position on the sidelines of mainstream politics – as opposed to labor in Europe, which has immersed itself in the neoliberal agenda. I conclude this final chapter with some general remarks on the significance of this primary election season beyond the Sanders campaign and the other issues I have discussed previously. In general, there have been many challenges to ideas that have remained unchallenged for a long time.

[183] David Brooks, "If Not Trump, What?," *New York Times*, 29 April 2016.

Both the right and the left in American politics have had surprising candidates, and there has been anger and discontent that have taken unexpected forms.

5 Conclusion

This thesis is an answer to the question of how conceptualizations of social class in the political discourse of the Bernie Sanders campaign has challenged the ideas about social class that has dominated political discourse since the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. It rests on the theory that different representations of social class in political discourse helps to either stand in the way of or facilitate class-consciousness. The recent focus on social class issues in the United States is striking and interesting, and it has contributed to increasing class-consciousness among Americans, as how we talk about things informs our experiences and understanding of our situation – as well as the opposite. The inequality discourse in its contemporary form has developed in response to a crisis of neoliberal capitalism – in other words the financial crisis of 2007-8, and the perception that capitalism in its current form (deregulated financial markets) was the cause of the crisis.

Chapter 2 argues that the social class discourse that has been dominant for the past few decades has stood in the way of class-consciousness. It has worked with an individualistic version of the American dream, casting the individual as the hero of the narrative, achieving his goals in spite of government. Furthermore, it has been informed by a neoliberal ideology, which sees the proper role of government as very limited and mainly to secure a free market system. This has caused major economic inequality in the United States, and especially the financial elite keep getting richer and richer. In 2007, the deregulated banks began to fail, throwing the United States and the rest of the world into the biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression, causing a Recession, as well as unemployment issues that are still being felt today. The inequality discourse I identify developed as a reaction against this situation.

I have found that the social class discourse of Bernie Sanders is a part of a larger discourse and movement which has been developing since the Occupy Wall Street movement, and whose earlier roots can be found in the idea of the "overclass" in the public discourse of the 1990s. Sanders' discursive ties to the Occupy movement can be seen in the percentage talk, opposition against an elite minority, and the application of revolutionary discourse. The percentage talk comes from economic reports measuring income inequality, and has redefined class lines across the 1 percent and the 99 percent.

The 1 percent and the billionaire class represent the elite minority the campaign and movement are in opposition to. Together, they revolt against the inequality caused by a neoliberal system, and the elite class that maintains it. I have called the new discourse they form a discourse of inequality, taken from Hammond's article on the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Central to the new inequality discourse are the terms billionaire class and the 1 percent, which represent the main antagonists in Sanders' campaign. His "grassroots movement" and "political revolution" is an attempt to mobilize and unite Americans against this elite, and regain control over the democratic process. I think that what part of what makes the social class discourse of Occupy Wall Street and the Bernie Sanders campaign so significant is partially its implications for Americans democracy. Their focus is on economic inequality. Bernie Sanders talks about the hard times for the lower and working classes, the shrinking of the middle class, and the need for universal healthcare and education regardless of economic ability. All of these things are important. But the core of the movement, and of the Bernie Sanders campaign, has been a push for fixing a broken American democracy in which Congress remains largely irresponsive to the will of the people. And they blame the economic elite and the politicians they fund for that broken democracy.

The term the 99 percent erases the differences between everyone but the elite and the rest. As a strategy, that leaves the focus on what meaningfully separates the two. Money is one, but agency is an even more important one. The elite is perceived to have political agency far beyond that of the 99 percent. They finance elections and have personal and professional relationships with policymakers. Furthermore, they use these advantages to gain influence over policies affecting them. In other words, the antagonists of the inequality discourse are a representation of the elite ruling class that Standing identifies.

Bernie Sanders presents himself as a socialist, a democratic socialist and a New Deal liberal. He draws on the legacy of Franklin Roosevelt, which gives credibility to his project as a tried and tested method by a very popular president. Some of his more drastically New Deal approaches may appear as outdated, however, for example the call for government to create and maintain millions of manual jobs in infrastructure. In American politics, however, labor has been marginalized for a long time, and the

opposition to establishment politics is one of the defining characteristics of this years' primary election. In other words, labor might seem like a viable option for the precariat in an American setting.

In conclusion, the Bernie Sanders campaign is the main bearer of a new inequality discourse in American politics, which has its roots in the "overclass" discourse of the 90s, reports measuring income inequality, and the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011. Its main characteristics are percentage talk and opposition to an elite class. The inequality discourse has challenged the way Americans think about class, most significantly by reintroducing the old American ideal of egalitarianism, and recasting it as a prerequisite for a fully functioning democracy.

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APPENDIX I

The 1 percent in selection of Bernie Sanders' campaign speeches

the top one-tenth of 1 percent

the top 1 percent

Remarks in Burlington, Vermont

"There is something profoundly wrong when the top one-tenth of 1 percent owns almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent, and when 99 percent of all new income goes to the top 1 percent."

"It is about creating an economy that works for all, and not just the one percent."

Remarks at Georgetown University

"Our government belongs to all of us, and not just the one percent."

"In fact, over the last 30 years, there has been a massive transfer of wealth – trillions of wealth – going from the middle class to the top one-tenth of 1 percent – a handful of people who have seen a doubling of the percentage of the wealth they own over that period."

"Unbelievably, and grotesquely, the top one-tenth of 1 percent owns nearly as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent."

"Despite the incredibly hard work and long hours of the American middle class, 58 percent of all new income generated today is going to the top one percent."

"I don't believe in special treatment for the top 1%, but I do believe in equal treatment for African-Americans who are right to proclaim the moral principle that Black Lives Matter."

Remarks in New York

"They understand that something is profoundly wrong when, in our country today, the top one-tenth of 1 percent own almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent and when the 20 richest people own more wealth than the bottom 150 million Americans — half of our population."

"They know that the system is rigged when the average person is working longer hours for lower wages, while 58 percent of all new income goes to the top 1 percent."

Pontificial Society for the Social Sciences

"In the year 2016, the top one percent of the people on this planet own more wealth than the bottom 99 percent, while the wealthiest 60 people – 60 people – own more than the bottom half – 3 1/2 billion people."

“Rather than an economy aimed at the common good, we have been left with an economy operated for the top 1 percent, who get richer and richer as the working class, the young and the poor fall further and further behind.”

Des Moines following Iowa Caucus

“They no longer want to see an economy in which the average American works longer hours for lower wages while almost all new income and wealth is going to the top 1%.”

“It is not fair when the top 0.1% today owns almost as much wealth as the bottom 90%.”

Iowa Jefferson Jackson dinner

“When you see the United States having more income and wealth inequality than almost any major country on earth, and almost all of the new income and wealth going to the top one percent, you know that that is not moral or sustainable and you demand a tax system that tells Wall Street, corporate America and the wealthiest people in this country that, yes, they are going to have to pay their fair share of taxes.”

Southern Christian Leadership Conference

“There is something profoundly wrong when the top one-tenth of 1 percent owns almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent, and when 99 percent of all new income goes to the top 1 percent.”

Liberty University Convocation

“We live in the wealthiest country in the history of the world but most Americans don't know that because almost all of that wealth and income is going to the top 1 percent.”

“When we talk about morality and when we talk about justice we have to understand that there is no justice when the top one-tenth of 1 percent own almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent.”

“There is no justice when all over this country people are working long hours for abysmally low wages, $7.25 an hour, $8 an hour, while 58 percent of all new income being created today goes to the top 1 percent.”

Nevada State AFL-CIO Constitutional Convention

“There is something profoundly wrong when almost all of the new income gains generated since the Wall Street crash is flowing to the top one percent.”

“There is something profoundly wrong when the top one-tenth of one percent owns almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent.”

New Hampshire Democratic Party Convention

“And they understand that while the very, very rich get richer, that while there has been a massive transfer of wealth from working families to the top one-tenth of one percent, and while we have more income and wealth inequality now than at any time since 1928, we do not need more establishment politics or establishment economics.”

New Hampshire Jefferson Jackson Dinner

"When most Americans understand that we are living in a rigged economy where almost all of the new income and wealth is going to the top 1 percent, where Wall Street continues to dominate our economic and political life, when corporate profits soar while millions of our children live in poverty — now is not the time for establishment economics."

Speeches with no mention of 1 percent

Democratic National Committee Summer Meeting

Fair Immigration Reform Summit

Latino Leadership Conference

National Nurses United Endorsement

Policy in the Middle East

APPENDIX II

The millionaire and billionaire class in selection of Bernie Sanders' speeches

Candidacy Announcement Burlington

"Today, we stand here and say loudly and clearly that; 'Enough is enough. This great nation and its government belong to all of the people, and not to a handful of billionaires, their Super-PACs and their lobbyists.'"

"There is something profoundly wrong when, in recent years, we have seen a proliferation of millionaires and billionaires at the same time as millions of Americans work longer hours for lower wages and we have the highest rate of childhood poverty of any major country on earth."

"What the Supreme Court essentially said was that it was not good enough for the billionaire class to own much of our economy."

"American democracy is not about billionaires being able to buy candidates and elections."

"This campaign is going to send a message to the billionaire class."

Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences

"Inexplicably, the United States political system doubled down on this reckless financial deregulation, when the U.S. Supreme Court in a series of deeply misguided decisions, unleashed an unprecedented flow of money into American politics. These decisions culminated in the infamous Citizen United case, which opened the financial spigots for huge campaign donations by billionaires and large corporations to turn the U.S. political system to their narrow and greedy advantage. It has established a system in which billionaires can buy elections. Rather than an economy aimed at the common good, we have been left with an economy operated for the top 1 percent, who get richer and richer as the working class, the young and the poor fall further and further behind. And the billionaires and banks have reaped the returns of their campaign investments, in the form of special tax privileges, imbalanced trade agreements that favor investors over workers, and that even give multinational companies extra-judicial power over governments that are trying to regulate them."

(note: all the instances were in one paragraph, so I included it in full)

Democratic National Committee Summer Meeting

“We need a political movement which is prepared to take on the billionaire class and create a government which represents all Americans, and not just corporate America and wealthy campaign donors.”

“We need a movement which tells the Koch brothers and the billionaire class that they will not be able to continue buying candidates and elections and that we will overturn this disastrous Citizen's United Supreme Court decision and move toward public funding of elections.”

Des Moines Following Iowa Caucus

“And what they were protecting is an American democracy of one person, one vote, not billionaires buying elections.”

“We do not represent the interests of the billionaire class, Wall Street, or corporate America. We don't want their money.”

“And that radical idea is we are going to create an economy that works for working families, not just the billionaire class.”

“That our government — the government of our great country belongs to all of us and not just a handful of billionaires.”

Liberty University Convocation in Lynchburg, Virginia

“There is no justice when, in recent years, we have seen a proliferation of millionaires and billionaires while, at the same time, the United States has the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world.”

Nevada State AFL-CIO Constitutional Convention

“In my view, the trade union movement is the last line of defense against the billionaire class and the moneyed interests who are out to destroy virtually every major piece of legislation passed in the last 80 years to protect the working people of this country.”

“The Koch brothers and their billionaire allies don't just want to cut Social Security, they want to eliminate Social Security; they don't want to just cut Medicare, they want to eliminate Medicare; they don't just want to cut healthcare at the VA, they want to eliminate the Veterans Administration; they don't want to just cut the Postal Service, they want to eliminate it; they're not only opposed to increasing the minimum wage, they don't believe in the concept of the minimum wage; they don't want to just cut the estate tax, they want to abolish it.”

“In other words, the Koch brothers and the billionaire class want it all.”

“And, that's why I believe that we need to create a political revolution in this country of millions of workers, veterans, the elderly, the disabled, people of color standing together and telling the billionaire class that enough is enough!”

“This country belongs to all of us, not just to a handful of millionaires and billionaires.”

“Maybe, just maybe, it's time that the American people truly had a candidate who will stand up for their interests, not just for CEOs and billionaires on Wall Street.”

“Why is it that, despite all of the incredible gains we have made in productivity and all of the advancements that we have been made in technology, millions of Americans are working longer hours for lower wages while a handful of billionaires do unbelievably well?”

“What the Supreme Court essentially said was that it was not good enough for the billionaire class to own much of our economy.”

“Long term, we need to go further and establish public funding of elections, so that the dark money of American politics is stopped before democracy is bought and paid for by a handful of billionaires and corporations.”

“American democracy is not about corporations and billionaires being able to buy candidates and elections.”

New Hampshire Democratic Party Convention

“I do not represent the corporate agenda or the billionaire class — and I do not want their money and I do not and will not have a Super-PAC.”

“The American people are catching on that we need a political movement which is prepared to take on the billionaire class and create a government which represents all Americans, and not just the people on top and wealthy campaign donors.”

“We need a movement which tells the Koch Brothers and the billionaire class that they will not be able to continue buying candidates and elections and that we will overturn this disastrous Citizen's United Supreme Court decision and move toward public funding of elections.”

New Hampshire Democratic Jefferson-Jackson Dinner

“When, in the last election, 63 percent of the American people didn't vote, when 80 percent of young people and low income people didn't vote; when millions of people have given up on the political process; when there is profound disgust across the political spectrum with a campaign finance system that allows millionaires and

billionaires to buy elections through their super PACs, now is not the time for establishment politics."

"I am running for president because we need an economy that works for working families, not just for millionaires and billionaires."

"I am running for president because it is time that Wall Street, corporate America and the billionaire class understand that they cannot have it all, that they are going to have to start paying their fair share of taxes."

"In America, millionaires and billionaires should not be able to buy elections."

Bernie Sanders on Democratic Socialism (Georgetown University)

"Super PACs funded by billionaires buy elections."

"The billionaire class cannot have it all."

"We must not accept a nation in which billionaires compete as to the size of their super-yachts, while children in America go hungry and veterans sleep out on the streets."

"In my view, it's time we had democratic socialism for working families, not just Wall Street, billionaires and large corporations."

"It is not acceptable that billionaire families are able to leave virtually all of their wealth to their families without paying a reasonable estate tax."

"Further, it is unacceptable that we have a corrupt campaign finance system which allows millionaires, billionaires and large corporations to contribute as much as they want to Super Pacs to elect candidates who will represent their special interests."

Remarks on Wall Street

"Our goal must be to create a financial system and an economy that works for all Americans, not just a handful of billionaires."

"Further, we need to structurally reform the Federal Reserve to make it a more democratic institution responsive to the needs of ordinary Americans, not just the billionaires on Wall Street."

Southern Christian Leadership Convention

"They fully understand that corporate greed is destroying our economy, that American politics is now dominated by a handful of billionaires and that much of the corporate media is prepared to discuss everything except the most important issues facing our country."

“There is something profoundly wrong when we have a proliferation of millionaires and billionaires at the same time as millions of Americans work longer hours for lower wages and we have the highest rate of childhood poverty of any major country on earth.”

“We need to send a message to the billionaire class: "You can't have it all. You can't get huge tax breaks while children in this country go hungry.”

“The billionaire class is controlling our political and economic lives because of the disastrous Citizens United case.”

“The billionaires do not want people to vote.”

“What the Supreme Court essentially said was that it was not good enough for the billionaire class to own much of our economy.”

“Long term, we need to go further and establish public funding of elections, so that the dark money of American politics is stopped before democracy is bought and paid for by a handful of billionaires and corporations.”

“American democracy is not about corporations and billionaires being able to buy candidates and elections.”

“We must repeal Citizens United and take the political process back from the billionaire class.”

“And when in this last election in November 63 percent of the American people chose not to vote; 80 percent of young people chose not to vote; and almost 75 percent of low-income workers chose not to vote, it should not come as a surprise that the stranglehold that the billionaire class has on the economy is tightening around the middle class.”

“This great nation and its government belong to all of the people, and not to a handful of billionaires, their Super-PACs and their lobbyists.”

Speeches with no instances of billionaire or millionaire

Fair Immigration Reform Movement Strategy Summit

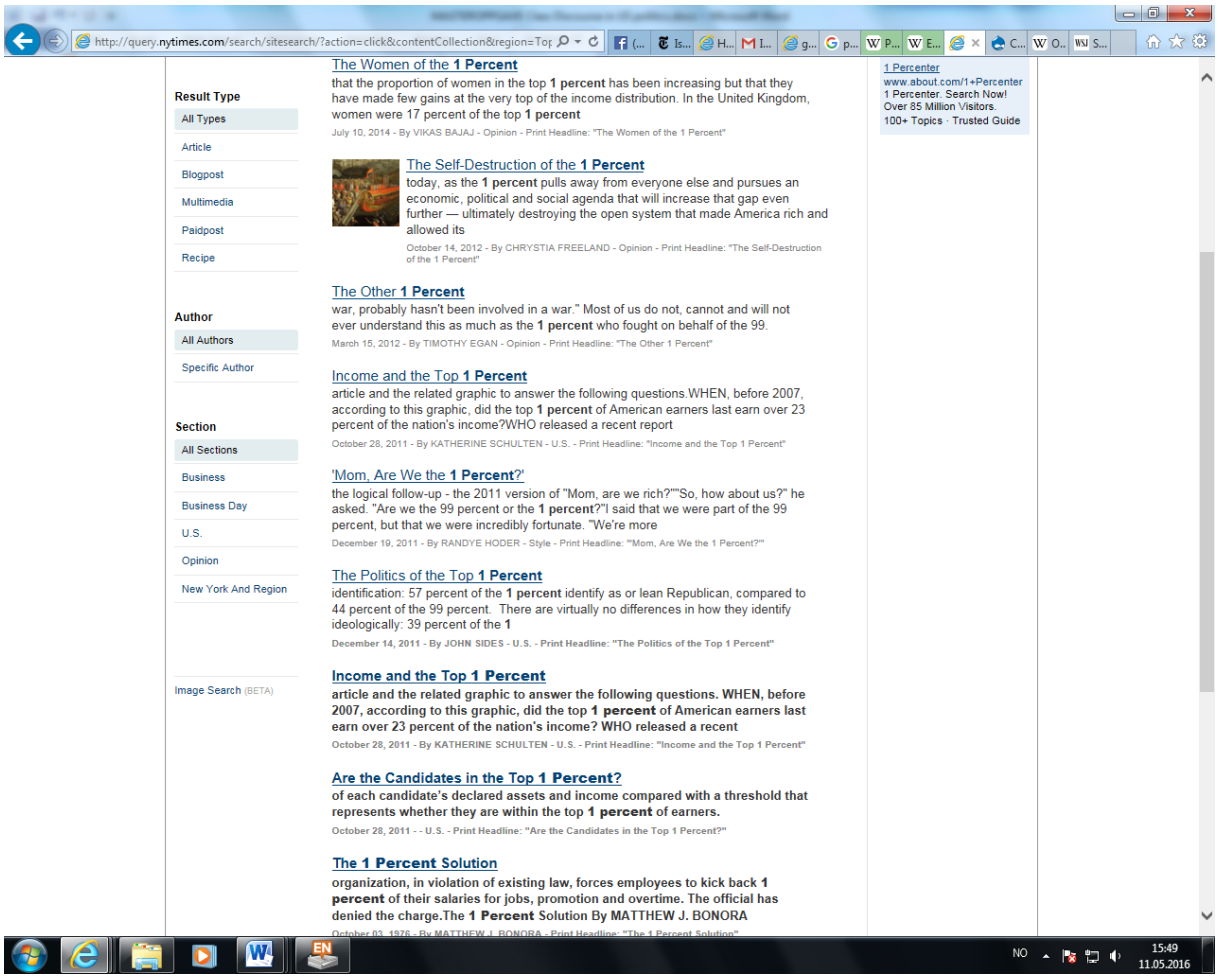
Iowa Democratic Party Jefferson-Jackson Dinner

National Nurses United Endorsement

Policy in the Middle East

National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials

APPENDIX III



APPENDIX IIII