On tax day, April 15, 2010, hundreds of thousands of Americans took to the streets with signs demanding lower taxes on the richest one percent. But why? Rich people have plenty of political influence. Why would they need to publicly demonstrate for lower taxes—and why would anyone who wasn't rich join the protest on their behalf?

To answer these questions, we should turn to history. Such protests long predate the Tea Party of our own time. Ever since the Sixteenth Amendment introduced a Federal income tax in 1913, rich Americans have protested new public policies that they thought would threaten their wealth. In this talk, I will tell the stories of protest movements that arose to challenge progressive taxation. Drawing from a mix of anti-progressive ideas, the leaders of these movements organized scattered local constituencies into effective campaigns in the 1920s, 1950s, 1980s, and our own era. I will show how protesters on behalf of the rich appropriated the tactics used by the Left, from the Populists and Progressives of the early twentieth century to the feminists and anti-war activists of the 1950s and 1960s. By comparing these movements, I will show why the wealthy sometimes protest in the public square, and why people who are not rich have so often rallied to their cause. This history can illuminate the origins of today's conflicts over taxation of the one percent.