

Good Times Home

The Mad Tea Party

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TUESDAY, 13 APRIL 2010 12:02 LISA JENSEN [COLUMNS - OPINION](#)



Regular readers of this column may recall that I was never exactly a cheerleader for George W. Bush. I did occasionally refer to him in print as the Cowboy Messiah (in regard to his reckless, faith-based warmongering), or the Weasel-in-Chief. OK, there were even times when I questioned the size, quality, or existence of his brain.

Most people understand that these are policy-based epithets aimed at a political figure whose various courses of action I find damaging in the extreme. Any public figure that represents certain policies is a target for legitimate expressions of dismay from those opposed to those policies.

But never did I ever hurl insults at George W. Bush, the man. George W. Bush, the man, wasn't the point; I saved all my invective—and believe me, there was plenty of it—for his politics of fear and deception, his criminal administration, even his smug demeanor. But never once did I ever stoop to insulting his race, his religion, or his culture.

But the face of public discourse in America is getting as ugly as the picture of Dorian Gray, especially in the last year. A covert element of racism has always been detectable in some of the more vitriolic opposition to Barack Obama, dating back to his presidential campaign in 2008. But there was nothing covert about protestors who spat on Congressmen last month on their way to vote on health care reform, pelting them with vile personal slurs about their race, heritage, or sexual orientation.

Welcome to the Mad Tea Party.

A noxious form of hooliganism has replaced public debate in this country. It began last spring, when hate-mongering, gunslinging Tea Party activists commandeered town hall meetings across the nation to drown out every opinion but their own. Spitting, slandering, personal attacks and verbal hate crimes have now become the norm. It's a classic case of Monkey See, Monkey Do: Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh (who no doubt enjoy the plushiest possible health care benefits themselves) foam at the mouth to get ratings, and their zombie disciples do the same.

Worse, they take it as a (chillingly literal) call to arms. When Tea Party poster girl Sarah Palin sent out a recent email to her followers targeting four female liberal Congresswomen in the upcoming November elections, an actual target was drawn on each woman's face. Palin doesn't do metaphor; when she tells her

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supporters to "Reload," she's not kidding.

It would be one thing to dismiss this bunch as the inevitable nutball fringe of any serious debate. But no responsible leader from the GOP (whose most right-wing platforms the Tea Partyistas most often embrace) has come forth to denounce their tactics. Indeed, Palin and other party leaders are currently trying to woo the loose aggregate of Tea Party fanatics (and their extensive mailing lists) into the GOP.

This is the divisive climate Obama is trying so desperately to heal. It's a noble idea, but that olive branch he's holding out has gotten pretty stale and rancid by now. The myth of bipartisan action isn't really working out for him, or for the nation.

It was attempted bipartisanship that nearly killed the health care reform bill. Even the diluted, conservative form of the bill as it now stands, with no public option, was very nearly stonewalled out of existence by Republicans and conservative Democrats who would rather stay in the showers and sulk than come out and play the game. It took Congress a year to figure out that the ironically named reconciliation vote was the way to move forward on a policy that the majority of Congresspersons, not to mention we, the people, actually wanted to see made into law.

Why hold enormous policy decisions hostage to the whims of a few disgruntled crybabies in Congress who would rather throw a hissy fit (preferably while the cameras are rolling) than participate in the public process for which they were elected?

This one step forward, two steps back approach seemed to have resurfaced once again last week. Not to belabor the Alice In Wonderland motif, but I felt like I'd fallen into the backward looking-glass world when I heard that Obama was opening up formerly protected coastal areas to oil drilling. True, this may just be another stab at bipartisan maneuvering, an opening gambit in some larger, as yet unforeseen, clean energy game plan, a concession made to the rabid right in hopes of gaining its support for something more comprehensive down the road. But it still looks and quacks a little too much like a duck for my taste.

Opening up protected areas to drilling is not exactly kicking the habit that got our planet into this mess. The only sane way to fight our insane addiction to oil is to start implementing clean energy programs now, while there's still a planet left to save.

A truly bipartisan government would be a rare and wonderful thing, but there's only so much time you can waste waiting for miracles to happen. I notice the previous administration didn't bother courting the approval of its opponents, let alone the American people, for the criminal shenanigans it carried out in our name. Obama needs to get to work with the same fervor, deconstructing old Bush policies and replacing them with his own forward-thinking vision of our future—now, while a future is still possible.

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written by David Auble, April 17, 2010

Hello Lisa,

I have a feeling that you have never actually attended a tea party rally. If you had, I think you would have seen that the great majority of the participants would have looked much like your grandparents and would have acted with the same intelligent politeness.

When I attended last weeks' Tea Party event in San Jose, there were approximately 3000 participants and not one sign of aggression, even though there were a handful of anti-tea party protesters.

The White House seems to be wrapped up in a new cause du jour; that of responsibility of a speaker or writer for the affects of his or her words. My request is that you spend some time and see for yourself who these people really are before you add to the steady stream of misinformation being regurgitated by the main stream media and pro-Obama politicians. These people have everything to gain by demonizing law abiding citizens who don't agree with their policies.

Is that what Santa Cruz is all about?

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