

By Emma Kaplan

From [World Can't Wait](#) | Original Article

I went with World Can't Wait to Jon Stewart and Steven Colbert's "Restore Sanity Rally and/or Fear." Stewart called out people "who are too busy to protest." He launched this rally in opposition to what he referred to as two extremes, those who think that "Obama is a socialist" and those who called "Bush a war criminal." This set the tone for the rally. Walking through the crowds, it was an eclectic circus. Signs degrading protest and political action read, "The Loudest Know The Least" and "I'm Apathetic."

Some people had signs actually challenging the Tea Party that said, "Tea Party: I'm Sorry You Are Losing Your White Power" and another that said "I love homosexuals, Muslims and socialists." People were dressed up from everything to Hooters girls to Hugh Hefner to Ronald Regan.

I began to realize that even though a large part of what motivated people to come to the rally was a concern for the rise of the Tea Party, the rally was going to be devoid of content, leaving only those like Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert and Obama to define what the content should be and determine what direction people should go in. Colbert and Stewart were filling the role of the Democrats, by playing on people's genuine outrage about the direction of the country and trying to hold them together in the middle. Ironically, Stewart is more worried about communists than about white supremacy. His last speech consisted of opposing "Stalinists and Marxists." He and Glenn Beck should get together and play golf.

In the name of moderation people are being led to something very bad: to be silent in the face of fascist forces, to pretend that things are sane when they are not. People are being told over and over again that no matter how bad things are, you can never do anything to change it. Sheryl Crow and Kid Rock performed a song about this that said, "I can't stop the war, shelter homeless or feed the poor. The least I can do is care." Is there anything more empowering and liberating?

It was clear that there was a need for an emergency intervention.

Those of us with World Can't Wait set up in a busy area with a lot of foot traffic and unfurled a banner that had pictures of Bush and Obama on it and read "Crimes Are Crimes No Matter Who Does Them." Some of us put on orange jumpsuits with black hoods and knelt next to the banner. We started agitation on the bullhorn and [giving people this flier](#), telling people that we understood why they were there to oppose what the Tea Party represented with some sharp examples pointing to why they are so dangerous, drawing out their racist and homophobic agenda.

At the same time we also pointed out that the drone bombing done by the Democrats who side with war criminals instead of the people, was not an alternative for humanity. Some people said they didn't agree with us and so we challenged them to come and debate. They argued that it was wrong to blanket ALL Tea Party people as racist. We talked about how it wasn't about blanketing people, it was about whether it's true or not. What kind of a movement attracts those who call black people the "n" word and gay people "faggots?" What kind of leadership does it have and where is it taking people? The anti-war movement has never held to tell people to leave their racist signs at home. It was clear that the people who didn't think the Tea Party is racist, really hadn't paid attention or followed that movement deeply.

We were agitating around the orange jumpsuits we were wearing and said, "Insanity is this [pointing to the jumpsuits]. You are living in a country that tortures people." People really responded to that, taking fliers. One person said, "This isn't a political rally." We got into what the situation is in this country: the rise of a fascist movement, [Obama's order to put a US citizen on the "to-be-killed list" without charges or trial](#), the continuing and escalating wars. We challenged people: "In a time like this, do people really need to be less political?"

Other people said we were spreading rhetoric about war crimes of Bush and Obama. We would challenge them to debate us and we would get into the content of why we were saying this, that it wasn't just leftist "spin," it was actually international law that deems illegal wars of aggression and torture as war crimes. We walked people through the [crimes revealed in Afghanistan and Iraq via WikiLeaks](#), told the story of [Binyan Mohammed](#) and other people who had been tortured in Guantanamo and Bagram prisons. The same people we spoke to about Guantanamo did not even know that it was still open.

We had something to offer people that Colbert and Stewart could not, the truth.

Even though to a great degree, people were being influenced by all the powers that be, it did not have a lot of depth to it and people were not thinking critically about what they were being

fed. Some people of conscience were grateful for that we were there. Especially that we were saying, it is TRUE that Bush is a war criminal and we had the facts to back this up.

I went around to people and interviewed them. I wanted to get some insight on why more people are not standing up against the torture and war. I interviewed people with these questions. (1) What brought you out to the "Rally to Restore Sanity?" (2) Have you heard of the "targeted assassination" list? What do you think about that? (3) Did you think that Bush should be prosecuted for war crimes? (4) Have you heard about WikiLeaks and the Pentagon threatening them for publicizing the truth about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq? What do you think about it? What do you think about the wars?

I was surprised to find that the majority of people I talked to who said that the reason why they came to the rally was to stop the extremism on both the right and left were also of the mindset that people in the Bush administration should be prosecuted. I wish I would have asked them what they thought the "extreme left" was because it obviously was not Jon Stewart's version nor was it clear whether they even thought if there was an extreme left. Many people also came because they were fans of Stewart/Colbert and mainly got their news from them.

People said that they came mainly because they were opposed to the Tea Party and were very alarmed about them, in particular the way they lie, cheat and steal to get their agenda across. Everybody I talked to had heard about WikiLeaks and said that it was very horrible what was revealed in the documents, but some people did not understand that this was not a result of bad military policy or mistakes of Bush but the way that wars for empire are fought - and that this is continuing. Not one person had heard of Obama's order for targeted assassinations. All in all, people were open to talk and even open to some debate to a degree. There were also people who came out because they had a very serious concern about the Tea Party and thought they aren't a joke. One couple from Idaho told me that they met a woman at the rally who is a Muslim and her husband, a heart surgeon, is, too. The Muslim woman told them, "When they say scary Muslims, they are talking about us." This seemed to really affect this couple, that there are people in America being hated like that. Another man I talked to said that he had been very depressed with Obama, especially because he had escalated the war and on the other hand very alarmed at the Tea Party movement.

I know that many of us who have followed Jon Stewart's hype are extremely frustrated and even sometimes feeling angry at the direction supposedly "sane" people are going in. We cannot blame or hate on people because they are being played. But we should understand why and challenge them sharply. Look, they didn't come up with the signs and slogans that predominated at the rally Saturday. The empire Obama heads up has been training them in this messaging via news stations, comedy shows, music groups and other cultural forms. Those of us who are awake have a responsibility to go up against this and intervene in creative ways, and lead people in an entirely different direction, a direction that is much more aligned with the interests of people in this country and around the world. This direction requires protesting these wars now - and YES being loud about them. This direction requires that the loudest SHOULD actually know the most and be acting on it. This direction requires that youth stop buying into the bullshit they are selling us when they equate edginess with apathy. The intolerable direction society is heading towards requires fucking rebelling against what is currently popular or

acceptable and challenging the war machine, whether it's the recruiters in the high schools or the CIA on college campuses.

This direction requires that we say no to drone killings, bombing of wedding parties, torture, and attacks on civil liberties no matter who is in office.