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Jon Stewart

Keynote Address at the Rally to Restore Sanity



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And now I thought we might have a moment, however brief, for some sincerity, if that's okay. I know there are boundaries for a comedian-pundit-talker guy, and I'm sure I'll find out tomorrow how I have violated them.

I'm really happy you guys are here -- even if none of us are really quite sure why we are here. Some of you may have seen today as a clarion call for action; or some of the hipper, more ironic cats, as a "clarion call" -- "for action." Clearly, some of you just wanted to see the Air and Space Museum and got royally screwed. And I'm sure a lot of you were just here to have a nice time, and I hope you did.

I know that many of you made a great effort to be here today, and I want you to know that everyone involved with this project worked incredibly hard to make sure that we honored the effort that you put in and gave you the best show that we could possibly do. We know your time's valuable, and we didn't want to waste it.

And we are all extremely honored to have had a chance to perform for you on this beautiful space -- on the Mall in Washington, D.C.

So, what exactly was this?

I can't control what people think this was. I can only tell you my intentions.



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This was not a rally to ridicule people of faith, or people of activism, or to look down our noses at the heartland, or passionate argument, or to suggest that times are not difficult and that we have nothing to fear. They are and we do. But we live now in hard times, not end times. And we can have animus and not be enemies.

But unfortunately, one of our main tools, in delineating the two, broke. The country's twenty-four hour politico, pundit, perpetual panic conflictinator did not cause our problems. But its existence makes solving them that much harder.

The press can hold its magnifying glass up to our problems, bringing them into focus, illuminating issues heretofore unseen. Or they can use that magnifying glass to light ants on fire and then perhaps host a week of shows on the sudden, unexpected, dangerous, flaming ant epidemic.

If we amplify everything, we hear nothing.

There are terrorists and racists and Stalinists and theocrats, but those are titles that must be earned.

You must have the resume. Not being able to distinguish between real racists and Tea Party-ers or real bigots and Juan Williams or Rick Sanchez is an insult; not only to those people but to the racists themselves, who have put in the exhausting effort it takes to hate. Just as the inability to distinguish terrorists from Moslems makes us less safe, not more.

The press is our immune system. If it overreacts to everything, we actually get sicker and perhaps eczema. And yet with that being said, I feel good, strangely, calmly good. Because the image of Americans that is reflected back to us by our political and media process is false. It is us through a fun house mirror and not the good kind that makes you look slim in the waist and maybe taller; but the kind where you have a giant forehead and an ass shaped like a month-old pumpkin, with one eyeball.

So, why would we work together. Why would you reach across the aisle to a pumpkin-assed, forehead, eyeball monster? If the picture of us were true, of course our inability to solve problems would actually be quite sane and reasonable. Why would you work with Marxists actively subverting our constitution or racists and homophobes who see no one's humanity but their own?

We hear every damn day about how fragile our country is, on the brink of catastrophe, torn by polarizing hate. And how it's a shame that we can't work together to get things done. The truth is we do. We work together to get things done every damn day!



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The only place we don't live is here or on cable TV. But Americans don't live here or on cable TV. Where we live, our values and principles form the foundation that sustains us, while we get things done; not the barriers that prevent us from getting things done.

Most Americans don't live their lives solely as Democrats, Republicans, Liberals, or Conservatives. Americans live their lives more as people that are just a little bit late for something they have to do. Often something they do not want to do, but they do it. Impossible things, everyday, that are only made possible through the little, reasonable compromises we all make.

Look on the screen. This is where we are. This is who we are, these cars. That's a school teacher who probably thinks his taxes are too high. He's going to work. There's another car. A woman with two small kids, can't really think about anything else right now. There's another car swaying, I don't even know if you can see it. A lady's in the NRA and loves Oprah. There's another car, an investment banker, gay, also likes Oprah. Another car is a Latino carpenter. Another car a fundamentalist, vacuum salesman. Atheist obstetrician. Mormon Jay-Z fan. But this is us.

Every one of the cars that you see is filled with individuals of strong belief and principles they hold dear. Often principles and beliefs in direct opposition to their fellow travelers. And yet these millions of cars must somehow find a way to squeeze one-by-one into a mile long, thirty-foot wide tunnel carved underneath a mighty river. Carved by people, by the way who I'm sure had their differences.

And they do it, concession by concession. You go, then I'll go. You go, then I'll go. You go, then I'll go. Oh my God, is that an NRA sticker on your car? Is that an Obama sticker on your car. Ah, oh that's okay, you go and then I'll go. And sure at some point, there will be a selfish jerk, who zips up the shoulder and cuts in at the last minute, but that individual is rare and he is scorned and not hired as an analyst.

Because we know instinctively as a people, that if we are to get through the darkness and back into the light, we have to work together. And the truth is there will always be darkness. And sometimes the light at the end of the tunnel isn't the promise land. Sometimes it's just New Jersey. But we do it anyway, together.

Do you want to know why I'm here and what I want from you? I can only assure you this. You have already given it to me. Your presence was what I wanted.

Sanity will always be and has always been in the eye of the beholder; and to see you here today and the kind of people that you are, has restored mine.

Thank you.