A rally is a rally is a rally?: The limitations of media framing in the reporting of the mega-rallies of 2010

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A rally is a rally is a rally?:
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thesis

by

VICTORIA GONZALEZ

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ABSTRACT

If anyone in the media were to openly claim that a political rally is “a rally is a rally,” they would no doubt befall a windstorm of strong reactions from those who feel their contributions to politics and to the cause for which they are rallying uniquely important. Today, it is not only those on the left that would make this claim but also conservatives who have been defending their right to rally and forging their own brand of “grassroots”. It is safe to say that no one would overtly make this claim, however the media’s actions in this case are stronger than their words. Through the use of stale framing packages, the mainstream media is displaying that the “Restoring Honor Rally,” the “One Nation Working Together March” and the “Rally to Restore Sanity/Fear” are essentially the same due to their nearly identical forms. Analysis of samples from the coverage of the three mega-rallies reveal what these media packages are and what issues go unnoticed as a result of such systematic reporting. Therefore, this paper goes about identifying those stale media frames, displaying the way in which the media relied upon the form of the events to dictate the nature of the reporting consequently hindering a deeper understanding of the functions.
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INTRODUCTION

“Rose is a rose is a rose”

-Gertrude Stein

The bus jostled its passengers gently as it moved up a short distance in the long line of cars headed for the Nation’s capital. This would have gone unnoticed had the motion not been reflected in my notes, causing an offending ripple that I shrugged off in order to keep up with the chattering of the young girl sitting next to me. She was a sophomore at Columbia University, visibly excited and eager like the rest of us for the bus to arrive at its final destination, meaning that we would be near the site of the “Restoring Sanity/Fear” Rally at last.

When it became undeniably clear that we were going to be late, people began streaming the rally to their phones, raising the volume with no consideration for how loud it eventually became, as it was assumed that everyone was interested. The talk amongst my fellow passengers became particularly loud, odd considering it was an accompaniment of literal strangers. Some spoke about politics and still others like my neighbor were attempting to put into words their rationale for making this journey. She

strung a tale of whimsy and rebellion as she recalled how her friends had convinced her that this would be the “Woodstock” of their generation. A loud exclamation from a nearby group of people huddled around an iPhone brought her out of her reverie long enough to realize that she had been talking for quite while and still did not know anything about me. So she asked, “Why are you going to the rally?”

Little did she know that the response to this question was long and complicated. This journey to attend a rally on the Washington Mall was one of the two I had made in the month of October, trips that seemed to ebb and flow together, similarly patterned but unique in their context and interactions. This uniqueness that I observed has been lost upon countless news organizations in their reporting of rally events. This is especially true of the reporting of the “Restoring Honor Rally,” the “One Nation Working Together March” and the “Restoring Sanity and/or Fear March.” Even brief descriptions of these rallies reveal the degree to which they differ from each other, and the ways in which at least two differ dramatically from what is conventionally thought of as a “traditional” political rally.

The “Restoring Honor Rally” was an event that took place on August 28, 2010 and was the brainchild of conservative radio and television host Glenn Beck. This event was pegged as a religious rally supported by “Freedom Works,” “Americans for Prosperity,” the “Tea Party Movement” and “Fox News Channel.” The “One Nation Working Together March,” on the other hand, was an event aimed to attract those who position themselves on the moderate to far left. It was held on October 2, 2010 and was sponsored by a wide variety of organizations ranging from “LGBT Equality,” “Veterans
for Peace,” “The Community Church of NY” and “Communist Party U.S.A.” Lastly, the “Restoring Sanity/Fear Rally” was Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert’s attempt to satirize the first two rallies discussed above by appealing to American moderates who could not overly identify with the extreme left or right and in doing so foster a more civil political discourse.

These three mega-rallies, which spanned from August to October 2010, can be viewed as exaggerated microcosmic representations of the major groups within our disjointed political environment; those who are ultra conservative, those who are ultra liberal and those who are convinced that a true dialogue between the two is possible. Or so it may seem. The label “rally” often connotes an association with politics and political parties. Furthermore, the typical trappings of the “rally” has triggered a set of media frames and descriptions that allow for little deviation from stock political characteristics, making it appear that any “rally is a rally is a rally.”

The following will begin by establishing the historical framework by which rally events have been reported and then discussing the forms and functions of the three rallies from 2010, in order to display the way in which the rallies became compartmentalized by the media to suit the overarching historical framework. In essence, this work aims to demonstrate that “rally” was used as a labeling mechanism by which to convey importance, not the intent or purposes of the event. This seems to be a fact that eluded most media, such that many missed the opportunity to pinpoint the finer issues at hand within politics and the social movements involved. Therefore, the final chapter following evaluation of media framing will focus on issues of race and religion.
METHOD AND DATA

The primary focus of analysis throughout this paper will be upon the stories provided by mainstream mass news media and alternative news media sources. It is through this type of media especially “that the politics of protest and dissent is now generally conveyed to wider audiences.”\(^2\) The nature of the events and who organized and sponsored them shaped the coverage, making them uneven in both the quality and the quantity. Therefore, the stories were chosen through sampling selections from *Lexis Nexis* searches of each event.\(^3\) *Lexis Nexis* is a database of countless documents dealing with a wide range of subjects from legal, business and news sources. Searching using only news sources, the initial search controlled for geography and time, meaning that all resulting stories would be national and have been written anywhere between two weeks prior and two weeks after the event. The rationale behind this is that the reporting from within that time span suitably represents the range from media expectations to observations and interpretations. The final selection resulted in a range of 32 – 35 articles for each event.

Be that as it may, functioning under the initial assumption that media portrayals would insufficiently portray the events and their respective purposes certain actions were taken to further contextualize the events. The websites for each event and their television coverage were carefully scrutinized. This was especially the case for the “Restoring Honor” rally, which I did not experience firsthand, for I had not anticipated that it would

\(^3\) The sampling process involved a random selection of articles all that were 500 words or more with a focus on attempting to find multiple stories from the same media source in order to better assess the elements of the frame being utilized and the range of reactions.
inspire a series of rallies that so keenly called into question current media frames and so fittingly represented the range of the political spectrum. Upon coming to this realization, I felt it necessary to attend both the “One Nation” and the “Restoring Sanity/Fear” rallies. For this reason, there will be ethnographic experiences strategically placed throughout the work, such as that in the introduction.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Given the increasingly contentious nature of American politics it is difficult to imagine that any one aspect would be left untouched by the sheer mass of publications that have endeavored to explain such contention. Yet, that does seem to be the case for the contentious nature of American mega-rallies, an element of American politics that has not inspired the development of its own branch, or even twig of scholarship. To be sure, there is a mass of literature within both social movement and political science scholarship that discusses the history of certain movements and political groups that have utilized rallies and demonstrations as tools, how they have done so, the political structure in which it was done and how useful this proved to be. However, never before has there been an opportunity to discuss the relationships of mega-rallies amongst each other in terms of the differing populations, politics, issues and ideals they represent and how they have been covered by the media as a result. This is the opportunity that the rallies throughout 2010 presents. My hope is that the analysis of the American political rally
and the framing of the events in 2010, the “Restoring Honor Rally,” “The One Nation Working Together March,” and the “Restoring Sanity/Fear Rally,” in the media will shed new light on how specific theoretical traditions can be used to reinforce understanding of social movements, politics, communications and potentially the news-entertainment divide.

To begin this process, a thorough understanding of the American political rally was necessary. Nevertheless, there is a sparse history of events such as these, most of which fall under the classification of “march on Washington.” Of the few books that have been penned on the subject, Lucy G. Barber’s Marching on Washington: The Forming of an American Political Tradition was the most comprehensive. The major merit of this book is also its downfall, in that it is one of the most comprehensive pieces on the subject, but in holding that position the scholarship is consequently limited to only a few dominant voices. Barber, in attempting to cover such a wide swath of history and a wide range of events essentially endorses a historical rubric for how these events have and still are being covered by the media. To say that the media practices of this time and in the past were the same would be a stretch, but to say that the historical narratives have had a firm hold upon how we understand the issue would be fair and perhaps an understatement. To supplement this, I delved into the scholarship of contentious events, specifically using Charles Tilly’s Contentious Performances as the basis for my understanding of the life spans of such events and the role that they have played throughout the history of social movements. Additionally, his description of contentious politics can be expanded to encompass the issues being discussed, as it is the media that are “making claims bearing
on someone else’s interests” and focusing upon “contention, collective action, and politics.”

Due to the fact that the historical accounts of American rallies is rather limited, the accounts of how the rallies have been reported and framed also remain rather limited. Additionally, all the mega-rallies of the past have been conducted at a time when the only sources of news people had access to were the physical newspaper and radio. One of the most striking and significant differences between the most recent string of rallies and those of the recent past has been the added elements of internet interactions, by those promoting the rallies, attending them, and later reporting on them.

A contemporary work, which focuses on this aspect of framing, is Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives. The merit of this book in particular is that editors D’Angelo and Kuypers have created a guide for framing analysis in these technological times, which includes web and blog frame analysis. I share the conviction that Stephen D. Cooper expresses in his chapter entitled “The Oppositional framing of Bloggers,” where he wrote “It is my view that the population of active bloggers and the document universe of their products have already evolved well beyond a simple feedback path into a decentralized and self-organizing institutional counterbalance to the established news outlets.” In this article he posits that nearly all posts can be split into four categories, those articles concerned with accuracy, framing, agenda setting/gate

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4 “Contentious politics involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else’s interests, in which governments appear either as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties. Contentious politics thus brings together three familiar features of social life: contention, collective action, and politics.” Charles Tilly, Contentious Performances (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 5.

5 The introduction of radio was from the 1930s onward.

keeping, and journalistic practices. Although I will not be parsing the blog articles so intensely, I will be utilizing these categories as labels to better synopsize and analyze the content of the articles.

Furthermore, it is the work of William Gamson and Andre Modigliani that will primarily guide the framing of the articles. In their article, “Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructivist Approach,” they argue that people take in various elements of discourse in the form of interpretative packages. They go on further to note that “packages ebb and flow in prominence and are constantly revised and updated to accommodate new events.” This statement surely rings true of most if not all media discourse. However, the one aspect of this analysis that can be taken to task is that of the speed of revision. This is because the discourse surrounding mega-rallies and events of this kind in general in the media is anything but “constantly” revised, rather the process merely borders on sporadic. This period of revision is long overdue and in many ways is rearing its transformative head as journalists and bloggers alike struggle with and at times break free from such packages, but not in any measurably substantive way.

To a certain extent I will be borrowing from Gamson and Modigliani’s model to formulate and discuss the major themes being utilized by these media packages. The first of the three “broad classes” they discuss are cultural resonances, where “ideas and language resonate with larger cultural themes.” There are many aspects of American culture that have been made quite clear in the reporting of these events and some that

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8 Ibid., 5.
have subsequently overlooked or identified as commonplace to the extent that they are deemed unnecessary to bring to attention. The second is sponsorship activities, which essentially discuss who is to profit from promoting a certain package. The sponsors are usually organizations, employing professional specialists whose daily jobs bring them into contact with journalists.”

This issue of sponsorship comes about in a large number of the articles on each event, as many journalists and bloggers attempt to negotiate exactly what it means to be grassroots. The last factor that Gamson and Modigliani discuss is media practices. This is representative of the fact that journalists (depending upon the journalist and the media outlet they may be employed by), when writing articles rely upon a familiar set of routines and practices in order to streamline the process and meet the deadlines they have been assigned.

In essence, I argue that the three rallies are being framed using variations of stale media packages more applicable to rallies of the past such as The Civil Rights March on Washington in 1963 than those mega-rallies that have taken place in 2010. To portray them in this way is to do a disservice to the events, to the discourse, and to the public, for in reality the three events though caged in similar political trappings are in reality very different kinds of animals.

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CHAPTER 1:
IF IT SOUNDS LIKE A RALLY: FORMS AND FUNCTIONS

Reading the official titles of the three events, the “Restoring Honor Rally,” the “One Nation Working Together March” and the “Restoring Sanity/Fear Rally;” the argument could be made that one of these things is not quite like the other. However, in this instance there is little to no difference between what constitutes a “march” and what constitutes a “rally.” Each of the three events took the form of a political rally, or gathering of like-minded people for the discussion of or support of politically related issues. This is true with one major caveat being the location of these rallies. The fact that they occur in “national public spaces” inspires their association with past marches on Washington D.C., where after physically marching en masse onto these spaces, citizens utilize them as “a place where groups of citizens can project their plans and demands on national government, where they can build support for their causes, and where they can act out their own visions of national politics.”10 This is not the case for the mega-rallies and the one event that places “March” in its title was adopted as a way to represent the influx of people from all over the country to one designated place. Be that as it may, many media outlets exhibit expectations of an event similar to the given description of a

“march on Washington.” This is evidenced in their approach to the rallies, reporting about them according to the form that they took in lieu of their functions as presented in part in the Table 1.1.

If the “Restoring Honor Rally” had been organized according to its original design its form and function would have aligned perfectly. This is because the initial conceptions of this event was that it be a political rally similar to, but on a larger scale than the Tea Party rallies that have been held by the conservative right. After a period of reflection, Beck decided that the event should instead serve as an opportunity for Americans of all political backgrounds to spiritually reconnect with God. The website claimed that America has spiritually lost its way and that, “Our freedom is possible only if we remain virtuous. Help us restore the values that founded this great nation. On August, 28th, come join us in our pledge to restore honor.”\textsuperscript{11} Literally, this statement indicates that the function of the rally is to serve as a large-scale religious awakening for the American people and suggests that the politics discussed will be more historically geared as opposed to current. This fact taken at face value would have inspired a very different manner of reporting, one potentially focused on the context, described by The Christian Science Monitor as being “mostly a heartfelt and largely nonpartisan expression of civic concern, patriotism, and religious faith.”\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} Brad Knickerbocker, “Glenn Beck rally: A warning to Obama and Democrats?; There may have been some Democrats at the Glenn Beck rally Saturday, but even many of them aren’t happy with the country’s direction. Does the large turnout portend trouble for Democrats?” The Christian Science Monitor 29 Aug. 2010.
Be that as it may, the fact that it was called a rally and featured some of the most influential Tea Party leaders, Glenn Beck and Sarah Palin, inspired the media to cover the event as the standard political rally and to expect political innuendo despite the overt religious agenda. In fact, the day following the rally, it was written, “Billed as a nonpolitical event, it nevertheless was a clarifying moment for those curious as to what clout anti-Washington sentiment could have on midterm congressional elections in November.”\(^\text{13}\) This opinion made by \textit{The Associate Press} was clearly dictated by the form of the event in conjunction with consideration for who organized it and by whom it was supported (see Table 1.2).

This was less the case for the “One Nation March” where the form and the function were in near perfect harmony according to both cultural and media expectations. This event most closely resembled the media template of a “march on Washington” as discussed above. A series of liberal and progressive organizations brought about the event in order to assemble people to demand further advancements and funding for jobs, education and equality. The promotion for the event read:

\begin{quote}
We all deserve a just and fair chance to achieve the American Dream. Our national identity is rooted in the ideal that all people – regardless of race, class, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, heritage or ability – should have the opportunity to fulfill their potential. One Nation Working Together will chart a bold, pragmatic path toward a more unified, sustainable, prosperous future by building support for these core principles and policy ideals.\(^\text{14}\)
\end{quote}

Hence, this group of people is being brought forth to the Washington Mall in order to demand something of the government, an occurrence identified by the media as being


\(^{14}\) “One Nation Working Together March,” <http://www.onenationworkingtogether.org/content/main>.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1.1  GENERAL INFORMATION FOR EACH EVENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EVENT</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Loc.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EVENT DESCRIPTION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speakers / Performers</strong></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1.2 SUPPORTERS (INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESTORING HONOR RALLY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenn Beck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Operations Warrior Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FreedomWorks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Americans For Prosperity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tea Party movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fox News Channel</td>
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<tr>
<td>9·12 Project</td>
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| **ONE NATION MARCH**                                  |

| **RESTORING SANITY RALLY**                            |
| Comedy Central, Arianna Huffington                    |
fitting of the type of stock media coverage given to other such events. This seemed to be exacerbated by the fact that there was no clear figurehead of this event, unlike the “Restoring Honor Rally” and there was no spectacle of any kind.\textsuperscript{15} For these reasons, in relation to the other rallies, the “One Nation” was to receive the least amount of media coverage as by media standards this was the least newsworthy event, meaning that a high percentage of the few articles that were printed on the subject were simply reprints of the Associated Press accounts.\textsuperscript{16} A clear consequence of relying on form in this event led to a dearth in attention to function and context.

In terms of the “Rally to Restore Sanity/Fear” the form of the event was highly debated as it caused many to question how this reflected the state of American politics and how this event changed the comedic roles of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert. The \textit{Pittsburg Post-Gazette} went on to pose several questions along these lines, such as “So is it a political protest or just comedic relief? The liberals’ answer to Glenn Beck’s Restoring Honor” rally in August, or just a chance to have a few laughs?”\textsuperscript{17}

The comedians had clearly toyed with the idea of having such an event, announcing rallies or marches with clever titles that never came to fruition, however this event was clearly the exception. It started out as two rallies, one led by Stewart and the other led by Colbert, where they would literally march to one another on the Washington Mall. Foreseeing the difficulty in achieving this, the form was changed to include both

\textsuperscript{15} This is despite the fact that some point to Ed Schultz as a figurehead, but despite being the rally’s biggest cheerleader and one of its guest speakers, he is not directly responsible for the organizing of the event.

\textsuperscript{16} This is true of 15 of the 32 articles or 46%, meaning that the other 64% was representative of original work. This is high in comparison to the other two rallies, where such articles represent less than 10% of the totals.

rallies, one geared to promoting civility in political discourse and one geared to satirizing this lack of civility. In essence, Colbert’s rally served as a foil to Stewart’s, in order to display the extremes to which political extremists have gone in order to make their points. Stewart’s political premise was that the presence of increasingly nasty political rhetoric made it difficult to rationally discuss and process pertinent political issues, essentially handicapping the government and corrupting political discourse.

Some, like The Washington Post, felt that such a form detracts from the overall point Stewart was attempting to make, “If satire is the art of saying something fake and pretending it’s real in order to make a point, you seem to be doing the opposite with this rally: Doing something real and pretending it’s fake in order to make your point…Keep throwing spitballs from the back. Don’t try to move to the front of the country.” The author here is putting forth the notion that the act of grouping people onto a national public space for a “rally” makes Stewart’s actions and messages more “real” than they are when presented on television.

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In this way it is the form that contributes and occasionally taints the meaning of the message, whether or not this message would be similar to or the exactly the same if it were to be presented on Stewart’s regular programming. Consequently, this rally became imbued with political meaning and reported as all other rallies have been despite the clear connotations of levity generally associated with satire. One of the only serious moments throughout the event was a speech where Stewart attempted to remind people of his purpose and plea to moderate extreme political rhetoric and in that speech he stated “this was not a rally to ridicule people of faith or people of activism.”

This is in many ways a concession to those rallies that came before, a statement which clearly distinguishes his cause from theirs, revealing how the functions of each differ in profound ways.

With such clear reliance upon forms, the framing mechanisms for each event were remarkably similar. The foundation for the framing mechanisms appropriated by the media was established with the first official march on Washington in 1894. The massive band of men that would come to be known as “Coxey’s Army” were organized in order to become what leader Jacob Coxey regarded as a “petition in boots.”

The media reports began by decrying the endeavor all together, questioning its legitimacy and then after a period of time switched to focus on crowd estimates and spectacle. Crowd estimates would eventually stand as the forefront of their concerns as the media was unsure of the exact number of pairs of boots that were on their way to Washington, causing the count to range from “600 to more than 1,000 depending on the

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degree of sympathy for the cause.”

For a countless number of such events that followed, crowd estimates would serve as the indicator of success, as it had been for a wide range of other spectacles and political events, such as debates. Scholars attempting to find more nuanced answers to the relationship between the frequency of media coverage and Washington demonstrations of various sizes from 1982 and 1991, found that crowd size continued to be the most persistently utilized qualifier by the media. Crowd size and its varying estimates according to “degree of sympathy for the cause” clearly has served as the most dominant theme amongst the news coverage of the Beck rally, but also the “One Nation” and the “Restoring Sanity/Fear” rallies that followed.

CHAPTER 2:
IF IT LOOKS LIKE A RALLY: CROWD ESTIMATES

How Many People Do You See?

Image 2.1 24

24 "Glenn Beck’s Restoring Honor Rally Attendance," iNews 29 Aug, 2010
With a fresh mug of coffee I sat down to watch television on the morning of August 28th, 2010. Prospects seemed bleak as I flipped through the guide looking for something interesting, only occasionally stopping on what seemed to be entertaining. Yet, on many channels I kept seeing this block of time dedicated to something called the “Restoring Honor Rally.” As I had little interest in restoring my honor or being told by some televangelist that my honor should be restored; I passed it up. That is until I reached C-SPAN, a point when my curiosity defeated my cynicism. I tuned in to the channel just as Glenn Beck, conservative television host for Fox News and radio host for the self-titled “The Glenn Beck Program,” was announced to the podium like a boxer to the ring. Certainly an echoed introduction featuring “Let’s get ready to rumble!” would not have seemed out of place that Saturday morning on the Washington Mall.

I placed my coffee down, too amazed by what I was seeing to keep the steaming mug steady: a massive crowd surrounding the Lincoln Memorial gave Beck a roaring reception. The crowd panned smoothly from those clapping solemnly to those who could not contain their excitement, people who were jumping up and down and waving their arms frantically in a conglomeration that looked similar to a mosh pit. Beck was in his element. Coffee and entertainment search abandoned, I sat rapt and amazed both by the enormity of the event and its contents.

Prior knowledge of Glenn Beck and the types of subjects he discusses on both his radio and television show did not prepare me for the first statement out of his mouth to be a comment about crowd size. In actuality, it was a sarcastic acknowledgement of the indifference that most media organizations other than Fox News have for him. He stated
that these venues were willing to admit that there were at least one thousand people present on the Washington Mall, a stark juxtaposition to the hulking mass of people he was greeting. Multiple statements about the crowd size and the media’s assessment of that size served as hooks for his subsequent speeches, reflections that reminded both the participants and the viewers that the significance of the event was not based solely on what occurred on the Washington Mall but was also based on the fact that what occurred there was being monitored and analyzed by the outside world.

Glenn Beck is a man accustomed to entertaining a large audience, a fact that media outlets both favorable and unfavorable to his cause were prepared for. Prior to the event, articles would note that the permit issued to Beck was for 300,000 people. Overall, there were few if any articles that went on to doubt Beck’s ability to draw such a crowd, but there were those, such as *The Atlantic Journal Constitution*, a conservative leaning newspaper, that choose to emphasize the importance of this number as it would be “one of the biggest public gatherings to fill the National Mall in recent history.”

By Beck’s own proclamation this number was in actuality too low, the “true” amount being closer to 500,000, an estimate which no doubt contributed to the PA Pundits blog remarking that the crowd could have been “300,000 or one million.” Other news organizations took on a more neutral approach, such as *The Christian Science Monitor* where instead of putting forth a conclusive number remarked, “The crowd was

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*This is despite the number of “Million Man” marches which have occurred, where despite the fact that accurate estimates of these events ceased in 1994 due to some controversy, the numbers always ranged in the hundred thousands.

huge by any count—likely at least a couple hundred thousand people judging by aerial photos and the reported comments of some police officers—stretching from the Lincoln Memorial back to the Washington Monument.”27 Another figure created in the interests of neutrality was provided by CBS News which calculated that “there were approximately 87,000 people there, plus or minus 9,000,” a figure that they felt was the only scientific estimate made of the number of people at the rally.”28

The most avid and vocal proponent of the “One Nation Rally” was MSNBC’s Ed Schultz, who clung to the above measurement provided by CBS and utilized it as a benchmark, proclaiming that anything below this number at the “One Nation Rally” would be the equivalent of admitting defeat to Glenn Beck and the Tea Party. It was in a broadcast of “The Ed Show” where Shultz effectively drew the line in the sand stating, “Glenn Beck is calling me out? Challenging me to restore honor at the One Nation Rally on October 2nd? Here I am fighting for the middle class, talking up the stories, hoping for the American dream.” Ed Schultz’s role at the event was master of ceremonies and for the causes concerned, he was admittedly their biggest cheerleader. He was so enthusiastic he went on to claim that the “One Nation Rally” was guaranteed to have “300,000, plus.”29

27 Brad Knickerbocker, “Glenn Beck rally: A warning to Obama and Democrats?; There may have been some Democrats at the Glenn Beck rally Saturday, but even many of them aren’t happy with the country’s direction. Does the large turnout portend trouble for Democrats?” The Christian Science Monitor 29 Aug. 2010.
28 “As part of our coverage of Glenn Beck's "Restoring Honor" rally Saturday, CBS News commissioned the company AirPhotosLive.com to offer an independent estimate of how many people showed up for the event. AirPhotosLive.com calculated that there were approximately 87,000 people there, plus or minus 9,000 people. It was the only scientific estimate made of the number of people at the rally.” Brian Montopoli, “Glenn Beck ‘Restoring Honor’ Rally Crowd Estimate Explained,” CBS News 31 Aug. 2010 <http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20015214-503544.html>.
Such remarks set the stage for a contentious debate about the intent of the “One Nation March” and whether or not this event was organized in direct response to Beck’s rally. A conservative blogger attempting to frame the event as a “copycat” rally, wrote,

One Nation organizers said that they began planning their event before learning about Beck’s rally and their march is not in reaction to it. Given the fact that so-called progressives have been continually monitoring Beck’s activities and pronouncements for several years, One Nation organizers would have to prove that they began substantively planning their event before November 21, 2009.\(^{30}\)

Whether or not the rally had been planned prior to or after the Beck rally should not be the issue most relevant to the events; however, it does set the stage for more elementary forms of comparison. This frame, devoid of consideration for the cause or intent of either rally, depicted a popularity contest that determined which political ideology was better charming the American public.

*Right Wing News* readily accepted the apparent challenge that the “One Nation March” posed, claiming that “The leftists are trying to emulate both Glenn Beck and the Tea Party movement by having their own march on D.C….They are claiming that ‘hundreds of thousands’ of their extreme leftist compatriots will gather at the Lincoln Memorial on Oct. 2 for a left-wig bacchanalia at our nation’s capital.”\(^{31}\) In this way, they use crowd measurements as the device by which to call into question the right of the “One Nation” organizers to hold a rally on the Washington Mall, suggesting that the promise of an inadequate turnout should obviate any desire to hold the event at all. One blog titled “Stop>>The Leftist Propaganda Machine” attempted to give what they

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perceive as a more accurate account of the crowd size compared to that provided by mainstream media through the use of aerial shots from both events.

The goal of giving the public access to a more concrete assessment of this highly debatable figure was noble, but has several flaws in that there is no knowing that these images were genuinely from the events being discussed. Also, there is no timing given to the images, meaning that the bottom half could portray a point when people were either beginning to congregate on the Mall or dispersing.

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Furthermore, Right Wing News summarily calls into question the accuracy of the potential crowd estimate by challenging, “Will they be able to get the ‘hundreds of thousands’ that they are claiming they are going to field? Or will it be little else but thousands of union members bused to the site and paid to be there in order to give a false impression of a great crowd?”33 This establishes the concept of the “true participant” as someone attending as a result of their own free will and desire to participate, while delegitimizing the presence of union members, a population genuinely attracted to the event and its cause due to the fact that it demands that America be “put back to work.”34

Contrastingly, there are a large number of articles that have portrayed more neutral estimates of rally attendance, but at the same time coupling the meaning of that number with the left’s ability to reinvigorate Democrats in light of increasing contention from the Right. One such article was from The Baltimore Sun where the author described the congregation as “thousands of activists from groups that support the Democratic Party” and followed this observation with the contention that this gathering was a “bid to rejuvenate the enthusiasm of more liberal voters and stave off a potential Republican comeback in next month’s midterm elections.”35 The latter statement clearly makes the association that the greater the attendance the better the ability of the Democrats to make such a comeback. However, many other articles choose to put moderate spins on the crowd estimates noting numbers in the high thousands, with many settling on the number 100,000. In the end, it seems that Schultz, despite not having met his initial 300,000

34 “One Nation Working Together March,” <http://www.onenationworkingtogether.org/content/main>.
person goal was most pleased with *The Washington Post* who reported a count of 175,000, an amount that far outweighed the estimates found throughout the majority of the press accounts.\(^\text{36}\)

Like the “One Nation” rally, Stewart’s “Restoring Sanity/Fear Rally” would not escape comparison to Beck, not just for the fact that Stewart was evidently mocking Beck, but that the event was predicted to outshine both the “Restoring Honor” and the “One Nation” rallies. Taking the crowd sizes of the first two rallies into account, an article in *The Christian Science Monitor* made the following assessment,

Since Glenn Beck’s August “rally to Restore Honor” produced an impressive turnout, the nation’s left has eagerly awaited an organized response. The unions tried to promote their ‘One Nation’ rally in October as the answer to Mr. Beck, but the sparsely attended protest floundered in comparison. The event that has instead entered the collective consciousness, as the meaningful rejoinder to Beck is Jon Stewart’s coming Rally to Restore Sanity.” With some 225,000 people pledging to attend on the rally’s Facebook page, it looks as though Mr. Stewart may out-mobilize both the unions, those traditional bastions of the Left, and Mr. Beck himself.\(^\text{37}\)

In one fell swoop this analysis depicts the media frames that have surrounded the events, where massive turnout means success and dwindling turnout means failure. This analysis is also significant in that it poses that the event capable of succeeding where the “One Nation” rally did not is the “Restoring Sanity/Fear” rally.

Additionally, it appears that the media’s need to account for crowd size at events has adapted to new media quite well, in that several articles other than that of *The Christian Science Monitor* focused on reported Facebook attendance as reflective of

\(^{37}\) Niv Elis, “Jon Stewart and a question of ‘Sanity’: why a comedian is now liberals’ No. 1 hero; As the Rally to Restore Sanity’ shows, America’s liberals are increasingly turning to Jon Stewart as their most inspirational figure. Part of the reason is President Obama’s declining political fortunes, but ultimately it is the left’s desire for civility that has turned a comedian into a political star,” *The Christian Science Monitor* 29 Oct. 2010.
physical attendance on the date of the rally. In fact, a blog called “The Notion” dedicated a post to the “Restoring Sanity/Fear” rally noting their 225,000 Facebook fans and sarcastically insulting Beck by stating, “Because everyone knew that a prime point of the event was to show that what Glenn Beck did with his (nearly pure white) Rally to Restore Honor on August 28 was like bragging about having over 100 friends on Facebook.”

This observation may be prelude to the increased utilization of social media in accounting for the popularity of such events, where a new criteria for success will be the amount of friends an event’s page has on Facebook or the amount coverage of the event has been viewed on Youtube, as opposed to those that were physically present at the event.

As this is not yet the case, it was the crowd estimates that existed as the primary bone of contention in the Beck versus Stewart debate. *The Washington Post*, in an article subtly titled “Just who does Jon Stewart think he is?” described the rally as the largest ‘nonpartisan’ event to hit the national Mall since…well, since a couple of months ago, when another basic-cable TV star, Glenn Beck hosted his ‘Restoring Honor’ rally on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Beck claimed his event was nonpartisan, too."

Predictably, this article is making the claim that a massive attendance at the rally must be coupled with political significance and therefore, the event can in no way maintain nonpartisanship. This sentiment was echoed by *The Philadelphia Daily News* when they wrote that “there is little disagreement that Saturday’s rally—which organizers have forecast to draw 60,000 people but which seems on track to be even larger—is the politically tinged event of the fall for the large demographic of Stewart and Colbert

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There were some in the media, like The New York Times that posed that “politically tinged” would be an understatement. The article presented on the cover, went on to describe John Stewart not as an entertainer but as a “political leader” as that “is what you call somebody if he hosts a rally on the Washington Mall for over 200,000 people.”

The media samples discussed above demonstrate that when an event is held on the Washington Mall and is attended by 200,000 people or more, the expectation is that the event is inherently political. This was the case for both the Beck and Stewart rallies, which may have had political undertones, but had few if any explicit political purposes. In essence, both appeared to be a call for reflection and sanity through two different mediums, one religion and the other media literacy. The focus on crowd count became so prevalent throughout the coverage of the other two rallies that it was not enough to comment upon the size of the event being reported but also those rallies that preceded it, making such comparisons standard convention before being able to delve into further details about the “One Nation” and later “Restoring Sanity/Fear” rallies.

There are several American “cultural resonances” that are displayed throughout the reporting of the Beck rally. Indeed, the discussion of crowd size is influenced by the presence of stale media packages that have been utilized to report rallies throughout history, suggesting that this is primarily an issue of media practices. However, the discussion of crowd size appears to be couched in a maxim generally associated with

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Americans; “bigger is better.” As a result, the crowd size for each rally is not simply put forth as a fact particular to that event, but as a number that should be taken into consideration alongside that of the rally or rallies that came before. Without any doubt, each rally attracted enough people to be deemed sufficiently successful; it is only in the juxtaposition of the amounts where the extent to which any one of them is “better” occurs. Accordingly, it is the Beck rally that set the bar by which the other two would be judged. The sponsorship factors at issue here are not as prevalent as they are for the “One Nation March”.

The cultural resonances that are most noticeable in that of the “One Nation March” seemed to be linked to the national ethos of the American Dream. The connotation in the reporting was that Beck put forth a product, a successful rally, and that the “One Nation Working Together” organizations were trying to emulate this product in a way that detracted from the original, and thus encroaching on what could be considered Beck’s American Dream. The groups that sponsor the event are brought to task throughout the reporting in the form discussions of union presence and in some cases the emphasis placed upon the presence of Communist organizations.\(^{42}\) The argument was that unions do not represent genuine sponsors as their involvement may be less about the issues at had and more about the fact that they will be getting paid to do so. The context of this argument is that increased union presence is detrimental to overall crowd count, but this ignores the function that the rally is serving in terms of demanding jobs. Therefore, focusing on the crowd estimates has hindered some media’s ability to discuss

\(^{42}\) This is something Glenn Beck “revealed” on his television and radio shows prior to the event on October 2\(^{nd}\), in an attempt to color the event as purely a gathering of Communists and Socialists.
the event critically, for in other circumstances making such common sense assumptions that unions will be present at rallies demanding jobs, would not have fueled a contentious numbers debate.

Clearly, both events provide apt examples of the way in which media practices are often questioned by other media sources. The lengthy argument about numbers is not solely about the event itself, but which media outlet got it right. The fact that the numbers are always subjective contributes to the numbers differing so drastically from news organization to news organization to blog. The debate then becomes focused on which media or other estimator may be in league with the organizers and have more stake in either boosting the numbers or dragging them down.

Crowd estimates were not debated as strictly for the “Rally to Restore Sanity/Fear” as the numbers reported remained fairly consistent, however the media practices that did come into play were critical of Stewart, as people believed he was diverging from his “proper” role as entertainer. Within that argument, a few media voiced concern over what it meant for American culture that one of the most successful and arguably significant political rallies as of late was organized by a comedian. It seems that culturally Americans are more in tune with things that can be classified as entertainment, as in Stewart and Colbert’s back-to-back shows on Comedy Central.

Neil Postman once wrote, “Television is our culture’s principal mode of knowing about itself. Therefore-and this is the critical point-how television staged the world
becomes the model for how the world is properly to be staged.”⁴³ In effect, through appropriating a grassroots approach to protest and staging it according to certain tenets of television and entertainment, Stewart is potentially redefining the way in which people choose to organize demonstrations. Essentially, by reporting “Rally to Restore Sanity/Fear” in the same ways in which a true political rally would be covered only with a greater deal of fanfare, the media is in a way legitimizing Stewart’s authority and his ability to hold such events.

The standard media packages that have been discussed seem to have overlooked certain facts from each of the events that could have established themes by which to more comprehensively analyze them individually and as a unit. For the Beck crowd size became a major issue making it appear as nothing more than a very successful Tea Party rally, despite the fact that the overall theme and context of the event differed drastically from that of what has come to be known as the “standard” Tea Party rally. The fact that the “One Nation Rally” best fit what is most typically regarded as a political rally seems to have been lost upon the media. Also, the very prevalent religious themes of the event seem to have been overshadowed by the religious elements of the “Restoring Honor Rally.” Additionally, the fact that John Stewart was attempting to create a mock-rally instead of a genuine political event, taints the salience of the message he wanted to bring across. Seen in this way, the rally could have been analyzed, as a commentary on what Americans have come to believe is the quintessential American rally.

These issues will all be discussed in the following chapters that respectively deal with topics of race and religion, the undeveloped media frames that when further diagnosed reveal what aspects of each rally seem the most collectively significant and the issues underlying the political contention that is evident between them.
CHAPTER 3:
MEDIA’S MISSING LINKS: RELIGION AND RACE

The plane touched down in Washington D.C. with little fanfare from those on board. The short flight from Boston was uneventful and gave people few opportunities to do anything let alone become bored or antsy. My exit from the plane was swift. With no bags other than the one on my back I made my way to find a bus that would take me to the Washington Mall where the “One Nation Working Together March” was soon to commence. I arrived first but was quickly followed by three other women, who had similarly never flown into Washington D.C. before, were on their way to the Washington Mall and were not inclined to wait for the bus. The cab driver pulled up to the curb and welcomed myself, a Hispanic girl in her mid 20s, a middle aged black woman member of the NAACP, a middle aged white woman who was covered in buttons head to toe and an elderly Native American woman in full authentic dance garb. Instead of being the beginning to a politically incorrect joke, this ride was the beginning of a unique experience for myself and the other women.

The conversation bounced lightly between all of us as we each told the tales of how we had managed to come to the rally (both financial and time wise) and why. What
no one mentioned was something that struck me as immediately important, the obvious diversity among our small group of rally goers. This cab ride was the precursor for the “One Nation” event, which among the three rallies proved to have the most racially diverse attendance. Though posed as non-partisan event, the majority of those in attendance were working class Democrats, a population known as being largely composed of middle to lower class ethnic minorities. In the short stroll from where the cab dropped us off to the Washington Mall both the extent of the diversity and the figurehead of it became clear. It was to be the face and the words of Martin Luther King Jr. that would be a dominant presence in both the signs and the speeches of the rally. This fact was either taken as commonplace to such an event, ignored by the media in attendance or not reported at all by those media who clearly did not attend. This was odd considering the already established media contest between the “One Nation March” and the “Restoring Honor Rally,” the latter that was met with controversy regarding Martin Luther King Jr. from the moment it was announced.

Beck publicized that the rally was to be held on August 28th, 2010, a day that marked the 47th anniversary of The Civil Rights March on Washington D.C. He claimed that he knew what the date meant, but in his planning did not recognize the “coincidence” until the media uproar. Whether or not this was truly a coincidence matters little, what is important was the manner in which this issue was debated. In the effort to attest to the coincidence but at the same time legitimize his rights to hold the event on that day, Beck sarcastically posed the question “Do white people own the legacy of Abraham Lincoln?” to which he answered, “I don't think they do. And I don't think black people own the
legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King. It's the idea of the content of character.\textsuperscript{44} Though this statement was issued with the intention of making a point about the rally, it seems to touch upon the subject of reverse racism, something that Beck has addressed one time before in his belief that President Obama is racist against white people.\textsuperscript{45}

The comment about Abraham Lincoln is made to illustrate that white people do not own the legacy of their most important historical figures and therefore black people should not be able to do so with the memory of Martin Luther King Jr. Assuming that the statement made by Beck was genuine and not one made in order to facilitate Beck’s ability to place himself on a pedestal similar to that of Martin Luther King Jr., it is a plea for equal rights to remember this important historical figure in the manner that Beck chooses. After dealing with the surprise of the timing coincidence Beck began to noticeably embrace the date and its meaning, stating that this was the “moment, quite honestly, that I think we reclaim the civil rights movement”\textsuperscript{46} and in doing so reclaim the memory of Martin Luther King Jr. for white people. The rhetoric here implies that people have lost sight of what was achieved during the Civil Rights March and that Beck and the “Restoring Honor” audience were the only people able to reclaim that legacy.

\textsuperscript{44} Glenn Beck, “The O’Reilly Factor,” 19 Aug. 2010.
\textsuperscript{45} “Glenn Beck: Obama Is a Racist: Fox News Commentator Says He believes Obama has ‘Deep-Seated Hatred’” \textit{CBS News} 29 Jul 2009 <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/07/29/politics/main5195604.shtml>. The idea of reverse racism is that in attempting to level the equality of the races, black people have developed a dislike of white people and white people get overlooked in an attempt to provide more opportunity to black people.
\textsuperscript{46} “Beck plans rally at Lincoln Memorial on anniversary of King’s famed “I have a Dream” speech,” The Associated Press; Fox.com 26 Aug. 2010.
This subject, like that of crowd estimates, varied in responses from those who were conservative leaning and supportive of Beck to those who were more neutral or those that were left leaning. The trend, however, is predominantly skewed against Beck, where even an article posted on the Fox News Website prior to the event, quoted Jess Levin, a spokesman for the liberal Media Matters for America as saying “This rally is about one thing and one thing only. And that’s promoting Beck’s political agenda.” It goes on further to note, “Civil rights leaders, too, hoped Beck wouldn’t exploit the King legacy at the spot. But the imagery—a packed lawn listening to a speaker standing in the shadow of the Lincoln—was certain to draw comparisons.”\(^47\) The latter statement suggests that both Beck’s timing and location were strategic in order to draw attention to himself and the event, but that he may have been distorting the idea of the “dream” into a veritable “nightmare.”

\(^47\) “Beck plans rally at Lincoln Memorial on anniversary of King’s famed “I have a Dream” speech,” The Associated Press; Fox.com 26 Aug. 2010.

Consistent with the above quote many comparisons were made by both mainstream and alternative media. One such alternative media site, *Slate Magazine*, similarly began by chastising the grandiosity of Beck in assuming that it would be he that would reclaim Martin Luther King Jr.’s (MLK) dream, but provided a more in depth comparison attempting to assume a level of accuracy not seen throughout most of the existing coverage at the time. Accordingly, the article stated,

> Beck and other speakers at Saturday’s rally don’t share King’s views about states’ rights or the role of government. But their invocations of his legacy were sustained and serious. They affirmed his central message—equality—and grouped him with the country’s Founding Fathers. The rally’s first featured speaker, Sarah Palin, praised ‘Washington and Lincoln and Martin Luther King.’

The article acknowledges the clear distinction between the two groups, but also emphasizes the respect with which the “Restoring Honor Rally” treated the memory of MLK.

The remark about how the invocations were “sustained and serious” was hinting at the larger issue at hand, that we live in a time where the work of MLK would be embraced by and used as a tool by the members of a predominantly white movement.

One of the few black people in attendance at this event noted that his ability to meander through the crowd and make friends with conservatives much like himself defied many people’s expectations about how minorities would be treated at the event. He remarked, “Instead of hooded Klansman frothing with hate and venom, I made dozens of new Facebook friends and gained a hundred Twitter followers.”

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give the appearance that the fact that Beck’s following is predominantly white is incidental, implying that the claims that label Beck and his audience racist are unfounded. Those who remain skeptical about Beck’s intentions believe that instilling this belief in people was one of the overall goals of the event in addition to elevating his rally to the importance of the “Civil Rights March.” Regardless, the media commentary regarding this issue predominantly takes the form of the negotiation of the “Civil Rights March” memory with little to no direct remarks about America’s current racial dynamics.

The “Restoring Honor Rally” not only inspired a myriad comparisons but it also prompted a counter rally that many media described as being miniature in comparison (3,000 attendees), a systematic description that equates to a pathetic attempt to claim Martin Luther King Jr.’s memory in the face of Beck’s clearly more successful effort. *The Washington Times* went as far as to claim that the small rally lead by Rev. Al Sharpton was stealing Beck’s thunder and essentially crashing the event; “Has anyone noticed how the left loves to invite themselves to things for the sole purpose of smearing them?” There was an expectation that the intended “smearing” could possibly lead to violence between the two groups, but *Grand Rapids Press* reported “Nobody fought, even when Beck and anti-Beck crowds encountered each other at one point in Sharpton’s march.” Accordingly, it is apparent that racial meaning has been assigned to the potential violence with expectations of “black on white” and “white on black” fighting due to the tangible racial divisions. It has been noted that such coverage exhibits “a

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larger ideological practice of classification and marginalization,” an issue that remained
absent from media commentary, both mainstream and alternative. In the end, the media
reports that included mention of the Sharpton rally conceded that the size of Beck’s rally
and the fact that Alveda King, Dr. Martin Luther King’s niece, was a speaker at the event,
gave credence to Beck’s claim on the day.

Despite the fact that the above two rallies were coined as the original “dueling
rallies,” Sharpton’s rally would go by the wayside in the media contest created between
the “Restoring Honor Rally” and the “One Nation March.” The articles detailing the
“One Nation March” often briefly acknowledge the diversity of the crowd, something the
media treats as commonplace due to the overall message of the event and the assumption
that such a message would attract a majority of minorities. Additionally, the fact that this
event was more similar in purpose and in crowd composition to the Civil Rights
Movement than the “Restoring Honor Rally” was brought up only once throughout the
articles in an interview with one of the speakers, Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez from Illinois. It
was said that his “remarks would not be political, but would appeal to the historic
location of the event and the deep connections between the civil rights movement of the
past and the struggles we face today.”

Though this was the one of the only acknowledgements of such a connection, the
context of the event provides additional fodder to the argument and additional evidence
that a significant thematic comparison between the “Restoring Honor Rally” and the

53 Jo Ellen Fair and Roberta J. Astroff, “Constructing Race and Violence: U.S. News Coverage and the
54 “Rep. Gutierrez Speaking at ‘One Nation’ March at Lincoln Memorial” Congressional Documents and
“One Nation March” was overlooked. The sign displayed in Image 3.2 was handed to people as they made their way onto the Mall and they more than just peppered the entire crowd. The yellow and black signs were in the hands of countless people, some who held several. Some of the signs were left abandoned on the sides of the mall and some were set spiked into the ground as a marker for person that had once been there and claimed that spot of earth. Additionally, the entirety of the famous “I Have a Dream” speech was read aloud by a diverse group of students as many who knew the words by heart shouted along throughout the crowd.

More substantive comparisons of the “One Nation March and the “Restoring Sanity/Fear Rally” on the subject of race were missing from media accounts for several reasons, one being that many media chose to report on the event using only background information or the first hand accounts of others. Secondly, it seems as if the media was silently acknowledging that the dispute over MLK’s memory by this point in time was no longer relevant, a silent agreement that this issue had been settled or at least dealt with to its fullest on the anniversary of the march back in August. Lastly, it could be that
minorities, black people in particular, are innately believed to “own” the memory of MLK, as Beck connoted, and thus their use of his words and imagery is no surprise to those reporting the event. Therefore race, in this instance, was not newsworthy.

Although there are those that could argue that the assertion I am about to make may be a bit of a stretch, I believe that the critique made above can also be applied to the “Restoring Sanity/Fear Rally” where a number of opportunities for comparison presented themselves but were left undeveloped. In this event, race becomes an issue not because of what it says about this event but what it says about the role of race in political rallies and mass gatherings of this kind. At the beginning of the rally, Jon Stewart jokingly instructs people in the audience to count off and when doing so, list their ethnicity, for he states that the two most important criteria for judging the success of a rally are “color and size.” Further addressing the audience, he goes on the say “as you know, if you have too many white people at a rally then your cause is racist, but if you have too many people of color at a rally then you must just be asking for something.” Here it seems that Stewart is alluding to both the Beck and the “One Nation March,” where he is essentially summing up what he felt to be the media’s reactions to the events, where Beck’s white following was described as being racist and the “One Nation” was dismissed due to the fact that the were a group of minorities ethnically and politically making demands similar to many other rallies and protests that occur, many of which go under reported. This statement also alludes to the fact that Stewart feels he attracted a crowd that was fairly

representative of the American population. True, the rally was more diverse than the Beck rally, but it was still predominantly populated by Caucasians.

After going about a brief and fake attempt at a crowd count Stewart states that he wishes to begin his rally with a more “traditional start.” This traditional start is a benediction given by Father Guido Sarducci played by comedian Don Novello. This is the first sign that the “Rally to Restore Sanity/Fear” is going to be traditional is any sense. It is in this instance when the form dictates the content despite the professed entertainment function. The fact that the benediction is essentially a joke, does not detract from the fact that Stewart introduces this element of the rally without a clear sense that he is satirizing the use of such religious elements in rallies, only the content of the message, where it is clear he believes that extremists go about a more subtle version of Sarducci’s attempt to identify the “chosen people.” Stewart’s acceptance of religion as part of the process reveals that though,

some religions have lost intensity, esteem, and membership or that many Americans are indifferent or antagonistic toward religion…these elements of decline have been offset by spectacular growth in some religions, the flowering of new faiths, periodic revivals of religious enthusiasm, and the spread of religious sentiment to some of the most ‘secularized’ segments of the population.56

It is the last aspect of the above statement that best explains the placement of religion in this event, as “The Daily Show” is widely acknowledged as attracting a primarily secular audience.

This remained the only blatant acknowledgement of the role of religion in political rallies, but the subject of religious tolerance was brought up again and again

throughout. However, the subject of religion was hardly discussed in the articles about the rally, potentially because its inclusion was not jarring enough to attract attention or it was determined that readers would be far more interested in other aspects of the rally. A journalist making the argument that Stewart had overstepped his bounds in organizing something closer to genuine “rally” as opposed to a satirical one could have used the benediction and its reference as being a “traditional element” of a rally as confirmation.

The one article that touched upon the subject of religion failed to cite any specific examples but claimed, “religious tensions were visible on the National Mall during the Stewart-Colbert rally. While organizers insisted their event was nonpartisan…the crowd included flocks of people who clearly were there to mock the views of religious and secular conservatives.” The statement gives the impression that Stewart was boldly satirizing the religious views of those “religious and secular conservatives.” The foundation for the statement is the belief that by satirizing a religious rally, Stewart is also satirizing the beliefs displayed during the event; however, a person present at the rally would know that this was not the case.

The unnamed event being referenced here was the “Restoring Honor Rally,” an event that has been called many things including the “Beckoning” and described as being something “between heartfelt sermon and star-spangled sideshow.” This moniker given to the event is reflective of a “dooms day” tone that often comes across in Beck’s radio and television programming, but this tone did not present itself in the rally as the

religious conversation never dips into the end of days or the coming of Christ. However, this is what some expected from him. Confusion of this kind prompted Beck to say

Saturday’s message---shhh! It’s a big secret. I’ve only talked about it for six months on one of the biggest cable news shows in history and the third largest radio show in America…so…just between us. Don’t anyone tell the media: The secret is God…We’re running low on personal responsibility. We’ve got a loss of integrity, a loss of shame in this country, a loss of principles and values. We’ve lost our way because we have lost God…And hopefully, we will mutually pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor. At least we will begin to look at those things, start to maybe challenge that we haven’t valued those things high enough—honesty, integrity, merit, personal responsibility, family, and God. That is why we call it the “Restoring Honor” event.59

People excepting the rally to become another Tea Party event, were surprised to find that Beck’s promise proved accurate.

There were those like Jennifer Harpers of *The Washington Times* that seemed taken aback when reporting, “It was mostly a heartfelt and largely nonpartisan expression of civic concern, patriotism, and religious faith.”60 Glenn Beck instructed all those who planned on attending to leave their political signs and buttons at home on the day of the event, something that most abided by with the exception of the occasional “Don’t Tread on Me” shirt or hat.61 Despite the fact that Beck is Mormon, the tone of the event embraced many faiths as Beck scheduled an invocation, a benediction and the presence of 240 representatives from myriad religious congregations. In doing this, the “chosen people” that Beck identified was not those of his own denomination or those people present at the event, but it was categorized as those Americans regardless of political inclination that are right with God and their faith. Though the audience’s nonpartisan

60 Brad Knickerbocker, “Glenn Beck rally: A warning to Obama and Democrats?; There may have been some Democrats at the Glenn Beck rally Saturday, but even many of them aren’t happy with the country’s direction. Does the large turnout portend trouble for Democrats?” *The Christian Science Monitor* 29 Aug. 2010.
61 “Don’t tread on Me” is the slogan of the Tea Party Movement.
status is arguable, as the majority was reported as being conservative Republicans many of which are Tea Party affiliated, the message was nonpartisan in that the focus was upon America’s morals, its spiritual faith and history.

Once this was found to be the case, the reporting of the rally followed the religious observance tentatively allowing for the possibility that there were political or anti-government messages embedded in the content and in the display itself. However, this resulted in scant questioning as to the reason why Beck would orchestrate an even in this way. Political scholars, Kenneth D. Wald and Calhoun Brown, have expressed the fact that religious and political topics “are treated with such delicacy because they evoke strong passions; men and women have been known to discuss, debate, argue, organize, demonstrate, resist, fight, and kill-or be killed-on behalf of their religious beliefs.”

According, to MSNC television host Lawrence O’Donnel, it is with such delicacy that people in the media and citizens throughout the country have treated Glenn Beck’s religious beliefs or at least when they are displayed with a modicum of sincerity and respect for God and the sanctity of religion in general. O’Donnell explains, “Beck has enjoyed the convention that we must never talk about another person’s religious beliefs.” He claims that without such collective media fear of talking about this subject, Beck’s “act would have collapsed along time ago.” Here O’Donnell makes plain his belief that religion is not so fiercely associated with Beck due to the strength of his personal beliefs.

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but is associated with him to the degree that he has used religion as a device with which to attract and maintain a particular type of audience.

One article about the “Restoring Honor Rally” went on to pose such a notion, but did not do so as a declarative statement about Beck or his intentions, but rather as an issue that they and the American public were still unsure about. The article affirms that two days after the “Restoring Honor rally drew a crowd that stretched from the Lincoln Memorial to the War II memorial, many Americans were still trying to figure out if the commentator had just seized the mantle of the religious right.” Whether or not Beck has in fact “seized the mantle of the religious right” cannot be confirmed, however what is clear is that the attempt to do so was a motivator for maintaining the religious nature of the event. Arguably, a political Tea Party rally would have attracted an audience Beck already has a strong hold with. Orchestrating a rally that was nondenominational and nonpartisan gave Beck the opportunity to tap into those on the religious right that may shy away from the Tea Party. Still, the potential of this type of event goes beyond the religious right and hypothetically attracted those religious independents and democrats that may feel alienated by secular Democratic politics. This displays that Beck is avoiding the creation of a rigid repertoire, where “participants repeat the same few routines over and over.” Instead, Beck is attempting to display that conservatives in general and perhaps the Tea Party more specifically have no discernable repertoire in that one event or “performance doesn’t affect or predict the next.”

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This seemed to also be the case for the “One Nation March” as they additionally attempted to revamp what has been thought of as a “rigid grassroots repertoire,” through organizing an event that was laden with religious imagery and songs. In fact, the very title of the event evokes the line from the United States’ Pledge of Allegiance, “one nation under God.” Yet, the fact that the “One Nation March” may have been attempting to compensate for the overwhelming religiosity displayed by the Glenn Beck and the right, escaped the notice of the media overall. Those in attendance and those that reported from afar were most likely unsurprised by the fact that the event began with an interfaith service and that speeches were punctuated by gospel songs, some the same as those that were sung during the Civil Right March. Yet, the presence of such religious elements appeared nowhere in the event website, nor in the articles or announcements about the event prior to October 2nd. These more “traditional elements” were taken for granted as necessary catalysts for the social and political mobilization of those in attendance. Those in the audience who were expecting a strictly political event were unperturbed by such grand religious displays. The exceptions to this rule are myself and this one other girl, who whispered as if it was something that deserved to remain a secret that she was “uncomfortable with the amount of religion” being presented.
“THE POINT”

It is at this point in many scholarly works that the author would attempt to make the final conclusion. However, a paper written about events that have broken free of both political and media conventions can also break free of certain structural conventions. In lieu of one conclusion there are in actuality many educated hypotheses or perhaps surmised conclusions that can be made from the above work.

For instance, it appears that the media is unwilling or unable to make connections between these mega-rallies and the relevant political and social issues that are at hand regarding race and religion. Specifically, it seems that the fact that America has a black president has created a reluctance to discuss issues of race even when glaring opportunities present themselves. Additionally, varying levels of religiousness that fall within a “happy” medium between zealots and atheists, go untouched by the media due to religion’s mainstay as a commonplace cultural and social convention. It is only the extremes in both cases that often become the subject of news reports, such as hate crimes against people of a particular race or religion. However, the simple point that can be
drawn from this work is that form does not dictate function and function is in no way restrained by form. This was displayed in multiple ways throughout the paper.

The first is with the “Restoring Honor Rally” where at the outset it appeared that the form would dictate the function. This is because the event and the location was determined prior to the complete change over of the content of the event. It was the content that dictated the function of the rally as being a spiritual event. The function, changed in this way, did not affect the form of the event as the location and arguably the size and composition of the crowd would have been similar to that of the political event originally planned. However, had Beck determined that the change in function dictated a change in form through a simple altering of the title, where “rally” would become “mass” or “service;” the frames used, the media that covered it and the amount of coverage would have differed drastically.

It has been noted above that the “One Nation March” was the event where form and function aligned best. Yet, this does not mean that the event did not deviate from its form. This form was a march orchestrated in order to demand jobs, education and equality for all in a significant national setting, suggesting purely political functions. Yet, this event also attempted to meet the diversity and spiritual needs of those in attendance through prayers and songs from a range of denominations with the purpose of bolstering both their sense of community and faith in the goals that they were working toward. The organizers did not overtly state this as function of the rally, but it seems that such a function may be assumed by but not determined by the conventional strictures of the “march/rally” form.
This is the case of the “Restoring Sanity/Fear Rally,” where by assuming that the role of religion is inherent to the form that he was attempting to satirize, Stewart in essence marred the proclaimed function of his own event. The functions stated were primarily entertainment but also reprieve from the political extremes he believes confront the American public on a regular basis. However, the form chosen suggests that Stewart is placing himself dead center in America’s political spectrum, a position that establishes him as a political actor no matter the proclaimed functions of the events. As in the case of the “Restoring Honor Rally,” a change of form through a shift in title and even venue would have created an event more in line with the functions and the expectations of the media (which is not to say that it is important to dictate actions according to such expectations). A “Comedy Jam to Restore Sanity/Fear” or simply “Sanity 2010” would have more accurately fit the functions.

With the forms and functions of these events being as fluid as they are, media coverage should adapt and become equally fluid. For the most part, the coverage reveals that the forms that the events took heavily influenced the media, as the form unmistakably defined the frame. According to the event advertisements and the actual content of the events, these forms and labels are primarily symbolic. They are symbolic in that they are representative of the collective that the organizers are attempting to attract and then once gathered the collective becomes that which is shown to the outside world as having “rallied” or “marched” as one. The function of the articles that cover these events is to convey the facts to the public, that people gathered and for what purpose. Those mainstream media not attached to the established media figureheads of the events,
Beck, Schutz, Stewart, serve as gatekeepers regulating biased perceptions of the events therefore providing facts to the public but also content as to how the events should be perceived in and amongst larger political and social issues.

Or at least this would be the expectation, yet the form that mainstream articles must assume often complicates the function by determining the amount of space an article is provided and limiting the amount of subjective material in what is conventionally thought of as strictly objective material. Reliance upon objectivity did not deter commentary regarding those issues thought to be the pillars of the reporting of rallies/marches on Washington, one such pillar being crowd size. This is because objectivity, which emphasizes unbiased reporting, ironically inspires unprecedented bias. In his work on the news Michael Shudson wrote, “objectivity in journalism, regarded as an antidote to bias, came to be looked upon as the most insidious bias of all. For ‘objective’ reporting reproduced a vision of social reality which refused to examine the basic structures of power and privilege.” In this case, the structures missed are those of race and religion but the message is still the same.

Alternative media has noticeably more leeway in what they cover, the amount of coverage and the issues chosen to focus upon. However, there are only a few examples displayed above where alternative media sites choose to address issues not covered in the mainstream news. In fact, many seem to have adopted the primary concerns of the mainstream articles and reframed them in a way to contribute to the contentious debate regarding crowd size. In either case, the stale news frames remain dominant in the

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66 Michael Shudson, Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers 161
reporting of the “Restoring Honor Rally,” “One Nation Working Together March” and the “Restoring Sanity/Fear Rally.”

What does the analysis say about the media’s priorities in reporting these events? Indeed, the argument could be made that perhaps there are more important issues that warrant the type of evaluative reporting that is being called for with these events. However, at a point in time when so much of our domestic political problems seem to be determined by the divergent sides represented by the rallies, the importance of their messages and how we receive them becomes elevated significantly. Substantively the analysis of the events above calls for a refiguring of the way in which the media addresses rallies, protests and demonstrations, particularly when so much of the content of the events is signaling their divergence from the conventional form, whatever that may be.

Journeys simply described generally take the form of A to B and from B back to A. Often times the modes of transportation and destinations are set. However, journeys are not only about where you are going and how you get there, they are often about the choices that are made, with the decision to go being the first and most important. This is true also of this paper. The decision to begin set me off on a journey flying along highways of mainstream media and then meandering throughout content from some well known and some lesser-known alternative media publications. There were times when I felt literally stuck in gridlock fighting for every inch and every line, but there were also
those times when I felt I was pushing myself beyond my limits going at a speed I did not know I was capable off. The initial answer to the question I was asked on the bus going to the “Restoring Sanity/Fear Rally,” “Why are you going to the rally?” took on the simplistic A to B form. Clearly, it has been much more than that with the real response warranting all, that which has been provided above.
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