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## A View from the Other Side: The 9/12 Protest

By [biconews](#) On 24 Sep, 2009 At 04:32 AM | Categorized As [Archives](#) | With [0 Comments](#)

**By Rachel Tillison**

Over lunch last week, I told my friends I was going to the latest tea party protest in Washington, D.C. They stared at me in confusion. After explaining what the protest was, confusion deepened into disapproval at the notion of a conservative rally.

But what most people don't realize is that these aren't simply anti-Obama protests. The marchers aren't just conservatives who are upset that the Democrats have the majority. These are people who want to exercise their right to free speech. They want to make their disapproval of the government's choices known.

"Orwell got it wrong, the year is 2009," one of the signs at the protest read.

Saturday in D.C. marked the end of the nationwide tea party protests that began last April. The "9-12 March on Washington" was the culmination of a select group of American's growing dissatisfaction with the government's choices over citizens. The weekend was more than just a protest; events included lobbying, summits and training on how to organize a protest.

I attended this event mainly out of curiosity and a desire to know the story of both sides. I had been following the "tea parties" for months. I couldn't help it. After watching the political tension in America grow and fester all summer, rather than finding myself annoyed by those people yelling at their local representatives during Healthcare forums, I was fascinated by them.

Whether or not I agreed with these people or their manner of expressing themselves, I was intrigued by their passion. There had to be a reason that these people were yelling so much, a reason that they were so outraged by what they had heard from legislators and reports on the news.

Because of this curiosity, my September 12 began at the ungodly hour of 5:30 a.m. when I woke up in order to get to 30th Street Station on time. As the train approached D.C., it was increasingly clear that more and more of the passengers were attending the rally. Sometime in between me pulling out reading for classes and putting it away, normal-clothed people had transformed into red, white and blue-wearing patriots.

I was even more surprised when I got off my train at Union Station and was swept into a large crowd of sign-wielding protesters already cheering for other's particularly witty signs: "Vote Ron Paul" and "Even my dog has a birth certificate"

From Union Station, I went directly to where the march on the Capitol was poised to begin at 11:30 a.m. The crowd was already large, predominantly white and mainly seemed to be of the baby boomer generation. It wasn't exactly a diverse crowd.

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I initially felt overwhelmed, but then decided to just go with the flow and follow everyone else in the crowd. This strategy proved to be successful as I got the chance to talk to multiple strangers as we marched on. Everyone that I struck up a conversation with was eager to talk to people my age and curious as to why I had even come, as there weren't many college students there in the morning.

What I really wanted to know was why these people had come out and what had motivated many to travel cross country to be there. Cathy, a mother from Frederick, Maryland explained that she was there for her daughter who is a freshman in college.

"I'm here because I'm scared," she said. "I've never been this afraid of government before."

Another woman explained that she was "just plain fed up" with decisions made over the past year.

We arrived at the Capitol and pushed through crowds to find a spot where the stage could partly be seen through security blockades. I spent the rest of the afternoon listening to a variety of speeches and patriotic songs meant to inspire the crowd. FreedomWorks, a grassroots group whose motto is "Less Taxes, Less Government, More Freedom," was one of the major sponsors of the event and coordinated many of the speakers. The speakers included everyone from representatives from FreedomWorks to nationwide tea party organizers and representatives. The content of the speeches varied widely in terms of how conservative they actually were.

However, there was a common theme among the speeches: the idea that Congress should work for the people and the feeling that Congress was not doing this. One popular chant promoted by Brendan Steinhauser, Director of Federal and State campaigns for FreedomWorks, was a call to Congress: "Can you hear us now? Can you?"

The moment was deafening. It was one of the most significant moments that I witnessed that day. Everyone in the crowd around me was literally yelling this to the steps leading up to the House.

By mid-afternoon, most of the speeches were winding down and the crowds began to thin out. The media estimates that several thousand people attended the event that day and that there was at least one representative from all 50 states. I even met a couple from Canada that now live in the U.S. The woman held their sign, which read, "Where will Canadians go for their health care?"

Her husband said, "We're genuinely concerned about the path this country is on." He gestured to his wife. "Her especially."

Of course, along with the good people I saw and talked to, there were also hecklers present in the crowd that the media used during their coverage to make generalizations about the entire group. There were pro-life interest groups that were using the event as a platform for their conservative base. I also spotted a few signs depicting Obama in Hitler's likeness—these were of course the signs that media outlets picked up on immediately. Even though I was there to observe and try to understand both sides of the argument, even I felt that this was unfair to the much greater majority of protestors that weren't depicting the President in this way.

At the end of my day, as I got ready to take my train back to Philadelphia, I wondered how I was going to relate my experiences to friends the next day. The next morning at breakfast, I told them about the protest, but as is with most recounted stories, I'm not sure they completely understood. I am still happy that I had the opportunity to go and see the rally in person. It opened my eyes further to emotions that many Americans are feeling right now and has helped me to re-evaluate my understanding of the country and all of its social and political complexities. If the day was nothing more than an adventure in the broad scope of my education, it at least turned out to be a lesson in democracy as well.



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