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Scary Tea Parties?

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WRITTEN BY RALPH R. REILAND
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The Pulitzers for top-notch journalism aren't what they used to be.

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Here's the way Pulitzer winner Eugene Robinson, an associate editor and columnist for the Washington Post, recently described the Tea Parties: "The overhyped Tea Party phenomenon is more about symbolism and screaming than anything else. A 'movement' that encompasses gun nuts, tax protesters, devotees of the gold standard, Sarah Palin, insurance company lobbyists, 'constitutionalists' who have not read the Constitution, Medicare recipients who oppose government-run health care, crazy 'birthers' who claim President Obama was born in another country, a contingent of outright racists (come on, people, let's be real) and a bunch of fat-cat professional politicians pretending to be 'outsiders' is not a coherent intellectual or political force."

I was at the Pittsburgh Tea Party on April 15 in Mellon Square and Mr. Robinson, a Pulitzer winner for outstanding commentary, got it far from outstandingly accurate on several counts.

First, there was no screaming, but rather thoughtful speeches about taxes, debt, deficits, government waste, the nation's founding principles, and the problem of burdening our children and grandchildren with unsustainable levels of debt and taxation.

Second, one could hardly say that the "Tea Party phenomenon" has been "overhyped," except in a negative way by the mainstream media and by establishment politicians. Right from the start, Nancy Pelosi warned that Tea Partiers were Nazis because she saw a picture of a swastika at an event. There were a few swastikas and Hitler pictures (plus some occasional pictures of hammers and sickles and Lenin and Che), but those were anti-Nazi, anti-totalitarian and anti-communist expressions, examples of the threat to individual liberty from overblown government and overreaching politicians.

Third, I was there and I'm no devotee of the gold standard, no devotee of Sarah Palin, not a lobbyist for an insurance company or any other capitalist enterprise, not a Medicare recipient, not an outright racist or a masquerading one, and not a fat-cat professional politician pretending to be an outsider.

On the "birther" part, that's not my issue. But if it were me and millions of people thought I was a foreign interloper, a pinko from Kenya, I'd just produce the original birth certificate.

I'm also no gun nut and not one of the " 'constitutionalists' who have not read the Constitution." I've read it and I have a pocket-size copy of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, courtesy of the Cato Institute, in my glove compartment.

Robinson concludes by saying that "American public opinion seems to have become an unguided Weapon of Mass Suspicion." In fact, that's exactly what Robinson has done in his ridiculing of the Tea Party. He's allowed his suspicions to distort his objectivity and destroy his credibility.

The issue is that the money the American people have invested in Social Security has been squandered by the government, their 401-K money has been gambled away in high-risk insurance schemes, government mandates have forced banks to give mortgage money to millions of unqualified borrowers, Medicaid and Medicare are going bankrupt, there's a gold-plated revolving door connecting the thieves on Wall Street with the political crooks in Washington, and now we're supposed to hand over our healthcare to these government geniuses.

The result is that four out of five Americans now say they don't trust the federal government to solve their problems, according to a recent Pew Research Center survey, and nearly one in three says the government is a "major threat" to their freedoms.

And the Tea Parties are the problem? Come on, Mr. Robinson, let's be real.

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