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## GENE HEALY

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### March on Washington shows right is hardly walking the plank

By: **GENE HEALY**  
Examiner Columnist  
September 15, 2009

In a new book, Sam Tanenhaus, The New York Times Book Review editor, proclaims the death of conservatism. Movement leaders' devotion to "radical" anti-government ideology, Tanenhaus argues, has left them "trapped in the irrelevant causes of another day, deaf to the actual conversation unfolding across the land."



9/12 March protesters in Washington, D.C., carried signs that were more tasteful than what was reported. (ASSOCIATED PRESS)

Judging by the massive crowd that descended on the district Saturday for the 9/12 March on Washington, you would have to be deaf not to recognize that small-government conservatism remains a vital part of the national conversation.

If you've been fed a steady media diet of MSNBC in the past few months, though, you could be excused for fearing a Pennsylvania Avenue takeover by a rabble of pitchfork-wielding cranks and extras from "Deliverance." But the crowd — "in excess of 75,000 people," according to a fire and EMS spokesman — was made up of orderly, pleasant, middle-class Americans from all across the country.

In my two hours at the protest, I didn't see a single "birther" sign and spied only one racially insensitive caricature. "Many of the signs," the liberal Center for American Progress alleges on its blog, "attacked President Obama using explicit racial and ethnic smears." That's simply false.

Surprisingly, for a march held the day after the 9/11 anniversary, the war on terror wasn't a prominent issue. Very few of the signs reflected the militarism and fearmongering that's been all too popular on the right in recent years. The most common 9/12 themes were pro-Constitution, anti-czar, anti-Obamacare and anti-bailout.

Amid the sea of hand-lettered placards were quite a few that warmed this columnist's cold libertarian heart, like "I am John Galt." A sign carried by a white-haired fellow, obviously pleased with his own erudition blared "What Would Mises Do?" "Austrian Business Cycle Theory!"

None of this is to suggest, however, that the 9/12 March showed all was right with the right. Movement conservatism clearly has a long-term demographic problem.

The crowd was disproportionately middle-aged and whiter than a Jimmy Buffett



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But the public seems increasingly resistant to new Big Government schemes. In a recent column, Andrew Kohut, president of the Pew Research Center, argues that Medicare could never have passed in the current political climate: "Broad distrust of government — which was not evident in the 1960s — is an important reason why Americans are reacting so differently to health care reform in 2009 than they did in 1965."

That rising distrust of Big Government — of which Saturday's march was the most vivid recent example — shows this much: The death of conservatism has been greatly exaggerated.

*Examiner columnist Gene Healy is a vice president at the Cato Institute and the author of "The Cult of the Presidency."*

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