

August 11, 2015

**Physics Central-Buzz Blog** runs a Fermi Problem answer to the question of whether going inside in a thunderstorm is necessary.

*It's easy enough to find the statistics for lightning strike injuries and deaths in the U.S., but since this is Fermi Problem Friday, I'd like to do it as I imagine Enrico Fermi would.*

*You have to start somewhere, of course, so I'll begin with the stat from Wikipedia that for most of the U.S. there are an average of about twenty lightning strikes that make it to the ground in every square kilometer of area each year. (There are many more between clouds, of course, and the number varies dramatically from place to place in the country, but hey - Fermi problem.)*

*The country has a population of 350 million people or so, last I heard, and a total area of 10 million square kilometers, so there are 35 people per square kilometer on average.*

*It seems reasonable to assume that being within ten meters of a lightning strike is seriously dangerous, so lets imagine that every square kilometer is broken up into ten-by-ten meter sections (100 square meter areas). If you happen to be in one of those sections when lightning hits it's likely you will be injured or killed.*

*So what are the odds of someone being struck by lightning in any random square kilometer in the U.S.? Well, there are  $100 \times 100 = 10,000$  sections that are ten meters on a side in each square kilometer. If there are 35 people per square kilometer and 20 strikes per year then the chances are*

*$(20/10,000) \times (35/10,000) = 700/100,000,000$  or roughly one in 150,000 that someone will be hit in any given square kilometer in one year.*

*If you multiply that by the number of square kilometers in the U.S. (10 million), you end up with an estimate of about 66 deaths from lightning strikes per year in the entire country.*

*In fact, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration reports 40 to 50 deaths due to lightning each year, so Fermi is spot on in this case. ...*

Time for a look at Jon Stewart. In a **NY Times OpEd**, a poly sci prof at UVA calls him the patron saint of liberal smugness.

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*It was Mr. Stewart's finest hour. He made an earnest pitch for civility in a place where there really was none. Which makes it too bad that in his 16 years of hosting "The Daily Show," he never lived up to his own responsibility. His prodigious talents — he was smart and funny, and even more of both when he was mad — perfectly positioned him to purge a particular smugness from our discourse. Instead, he embodied it. I loved watching him, and hated it too.*

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*The evidence for these beliefs is not good. Liberals turn out to be just as prone to their own forms of intolerance, ignorance and bias. But the beliefs are comforting to many. They give their bearers a sense of intellectual and even moral superiority. And they affect behavior. They inform the condescension and self-righteousness with which liberals often treat conservatives. ...*

**Jonathan Tobin** posts on Jon Stewart and the politics of contempt.

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*There is a long and honorable tradition of political humor and satire in the Western canon dating back to Jonathan Swift. But though Stewart's routines were often undeniably funny, his show deserved to be remembered more for deceptive editing of interviews of those whose views he sought to skewer and the softballs he tossed at liberals and Democrats. Though he pretended at times to be above mere partisanship and took shots at easy though non-controversial Democratic targets, he was in a real sense the poet laureate of the Democratic Party in the last decade. The cheap shots in Obama's speech the day before Stewart exited stage left is a symbol but a telling one since it illustrates the way the comedian's style has infected mainstream politics. Whereas in an earlier era it would have been unthinkable for a commander-in-chief to stoop to speak of mainstream political opponents as the moral equivalent of an Iranian mob, this kind of incendiary reference is stereotypical Stewart.*

*The point about his style is not that it was both funny and unfair, but the way it conveys a sort of not-so-secret handshake among the young and the fashionably liberal. In this world, differing views don't have to be engaged with, let alone disputed. They can, instead, be dismissed with a vicious swipe aimed at conveying the message that anyone who dissents from liberal orthodoxy is beyond contempt. ...*

And **The Federalist** thinks he became the left's Donald Trump.

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Rumsfeld and Bush, but it was too effective. By 2005, Stewart seemed to be pulling his punches, although he still criticized Democrats for their foolishness. Dick Durbin's comparison of Bush and Hitler inspired a masterful takedown of Godwin's Law.

*"Please stop calling people Hitler when you disagree with them. It demeans you. It demeans your opponent. And, to be honest, it demeans Hitler. He worked too many years, too hard to be that evil to have every Tom, Dick, and Harry come along and say 'Yeah, you're being Hitler.' No. You know who was Hitler—Hitler," he said.*

Election day 2006 marked the turning point. Upon seeing his effectiveness at swinging voters and driving youth turnout, he made a conscious decision to adopt the inverse of Ronald Reagan's Eleventh Commandment: *Thou shalt not criticize a Democrat*. Never again did he speak truth to power. He catered to it, slamming the powerful for not exercising more power. The withering monologues were replaced with mere sighs at the stupidity of those who didn't agree with Barack Obama.

### **Jon Stewart's Dishonest Editing**

If this was commentary, it was WWE commentary complete with fabricated storylines and DEVASTATING PULVERIZATION of straw men. The mask came off when guests began publicizing Stewart's tactics for tickling the liberal ego. First came Jonah Goldberg's infamous segment, in which the heroic "Daily Show" editing crew condensed 20 minutes of Stewart getting embarrassed for not bothering to read the book that left him reflexively offended into six minutes of Goldberg shouting. ...

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### **Physics Central Buzz Blog**

#### **[Fermi Problem Friday: The Logic of Lightning Safety](#)**



Summer is the most dangerous season for lightning strikes, which prompted CNN to run an article recently about [safety steps to take during thunderstorms](#). The chief action they recommend is to go indoors when you hear thunder.

Now I'm not fond of getting sued, so I'm not going to give you any different advice about

lightning safety, but I've spent a little time looking at the numbers, and frankly I doubt I'm going to be in any rush to head inside the next time a thunderstorm whips up around my area.

## Lightning Strike Odds

It's easy enough to find the statistics for lightning strike injuries and deaths in the U.S., but since this is Fermi Problem Friday, I'd like to do it as I imagine [Enrico Fermi would](#).

You have to start somewhere, of course, so I'll begin with the [stat from Wikipedia](#) that for most of the U.S. there are an average of about twenty lightning strikes that make it to the ground in every square kilometer of area each year. (There are many more between clouds, of course, and the number varies dramatically from place to place in the country, but hey - [Fermi problem](#).)

The country has a population of 350 million people or so, last I heard, and a total area of 10 million square kilometers, so there are 35 people per square kilometer on average.

It seems reasonable to assume that being within ten meters of a lightning strike is seriously dangerous, so let's imagine that every square kilometer is broken up into ten-by-ten meter sections (100 square meter areas). If you happen to be in one of those sections when lightning hits it's likely you will be injured or killed.

So what are the odds of someone being struck by lightning in any random square kilometer in the U.S.? Well, there are  $100 \times 100 = 10,000$  sections that are ten meters on a side in each square kilometer. If there are 35 people per square kilometer and 20 strikes per year then the chances are

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In fact, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration [reports](#) 40 to 50 deaths due to lightning each year, so Fermi is spot on in this case.

## Risky Business

Clearly, if you don't want to be one of those 50 or so victims (out of 350,000,000 non-victims), you should get inside when it storms -- unless your house or other place of shelter has stairs. According to the [CDC](#), 26,786 people died by falling down stairs or steps between 1999 and 2013. That's 1,913 deaths per year. We have steps and stairs in my house and my office, so I'm at about 40 times greater risk of death by stairs than death by lightning.

The CDC also reports that 1400 people die every year falling out of beds or getting tangled up in bed sheets, so I certainly don't want to be in bed if I can be out in a thunderstorm.

Of course, nearly 5000 people are killed each year by being hit by vehicles, so I don't think I should be outside at all, whether there's lightning or not. Except for the fact that nearly as many people die by being trapped inside during a fire, so inside is definitely not the place to be either. Hmmmm. Tough call.

## Lightning Safety?

Should you follow the National Weather Service lightning safety guidelines? If you want to avoid the minute chance (0.0001% per year) that you will be hit by lightning, of course you should. I'd be a fool to advise anything else.

Still, despite the lightning risks, the killer flights of stairs, deadly beds, murderous vehicles and flammable building materials, the greatest killers of them all are diseases. Heart and lung diseases, in particular, kill hundreds of thousands of people every year. So I'm probably best off striding past all the other minor threats in pursuit of more aerobic exercise, which for me usually means getting outside for a walk or a jog.

The next time it's thundering, the very best thing I personally believe I can do to keep from dying is probably to grab a pair of galoshes and go for a stroll in the rain. By all means, everyone else should stay inside out of the storm -- at least according to CNN and the National Weather Service.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fermi\\_problem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fermi_problem)

## NY Times

### [Jon Stewart, Patron Saint of Liberal Smugness](#)

by Gerard Alexander

IT shows how gifted Jon Stewart is that his best [moment](#) happened on someone else's show. He appeared in 2004 on "[Crossfire](#)," a CNN yelling program, and asked the hosts to take seriously their responsibility to public understanding by having useful conversations instead of shouting matches.

It was Mr. Stewart's finest hour. He made an earnest pitch for civility in a place where there really was none. Which makes it too bad that in his 16 years of hosting "The Daily Show," he never lived up to his own responsibility. His prodigious talents — he was smart and funny, and even more of both when he was mad — perfectly positioned him to purge a particular smugness from our discourse. Instead, he embodied it. I loved watching him, and hated it too.

Many liberals, but not conservatives, believe there is an important asymmetry in American politics. These liberals believe that people on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum are fundamentally different. Specifically, they believe that liberals are much more open to change than conservatives, more tolerant of differences, more motivated by the public good and, maybe most of all, smarter and better informed.

The evidence for these beliefs is not good. Liberals turn out to be [just as prone](#) to their own forms of intolerance, ignorance and bias. But the beliefs are comforting to many. They give their bearers a sense of intellectual and even moral superiority. And they affect behavior. They inform the [condescension](#) and self-righteousness with which liberals often treat conservatives. They explain why many liberals have greeted Tea Partiers and other grass-roots conservatives with outsize alarm. They explain why liberals fixate on figures such as Sarah Palin and Todd Akin, who represent the worst that many liberals are prepared to see in conservatives. These liberals

often end up sounding like Jon Lovitz, on "[Saturday Night Live](#)," impersonating Michael Dukakis in 1988, gesturing toward the Republican and saying "I can't believe I'm losing to this guy!" This sense of superiority is hardly the only cause of our polarized public discourse, but it sure doesn't help.

And Mr. Stewart, who signed off from "The Daily Show" [on Thursday](#), was more qualified than anybody to puncture this particular pretension. He trained his [liberal-leaning](#) audience to mock hypocrisy, incoherence and stupidity, and could have nudged them to see the planks in their own eyes, too. Instead, he cultivated their intellectual smugness by personifying it.

I don't mean the know-it-all persona he adopted on the air. That's normal for a host. If anything, he was unusually self-deprecating for his line of work. And I don't mean that Mr. Stewart thought all progressives were perfect. When some self-styled smart liberals didn't vaccinate their children, he cracked: "[They're not ignorant. They practice a mindful stupidity.](#)" But there was no doubt where he tilted politically. Conservatives were his main target when George W. Bush was president, and also when Barack Obama took office.

His claims to be objective fell flat. For instance, Mr. Stewart [denied being in President Obama's corner](#) by re-airing a clip in which he had made fun of the [Obamacare website's rollout](#), as if that was the same as questioning Obamacare itself. That was par for Mr. Stewart's course, mocking liberals' tactics and implementation but not their underlying assumptions or ideas.

He could have made the liberals in his audience more open to dialogue across the great left/right divide by asking them to examine themselves more carefully and to admit that both ideological camps contain fools. Instead, he was a cultural entrepreneur who provided those viewers with the validation they wanted.

Maybe that's why my strongest memory of Mr. Stewart, like that of many other conservatives, is probably going to be his 2010 interview with the Berkeley law professor John Yoo. Mr. Yoo had served in Mr. Bush's Justice Department and had drafted memos laying out what techniques could and couldn't be used to interrogate Al Qaeda detainees. Mr. Stewart seemed to go into the [interview](#) expecting a menacing Clint Eastwood type, who was fully prepared to zap the genitals of some terrorist if that's what it took to protect America's women and children.

Mr. Stewart was caught unaware by the quiet, reasonable [Mr. Yoo](#), who [explained](#) that he had been asked to determine what legally constituted torture so the government could safely stay on *this* side of the line. The issue, in other words, wasn't whether torture was justified but what constituted it and what didn't. Ask yourself how intellectually curious Mr. Stewart really could be, not to know that this is what Bush administration officials had been saying all along?

Mr. Stewart later acknowledged that [Mr. Yoo had bested him](#), which didn't happen very often. In that sense, the interview was an outlier. But it wasn't a coincidence. Mr. Stewart had gone in lazy, relying on a caricature, and seemingly unprepared for the thoughtful conservative sitting in his guest chair.

After all those years, the comedian turned liberal standard-bearer still didn't really comprehend the conservatives on the other side of the divide. Worse, he didn't help his liberal viewers better understand themselves.

*An associate professor of politics at the University of Virginia.*

## Contentions

### Jon Stewart and the Politics of Contempt

by Jonathan S. Tobin

While Republicans are focused on the presidential debates tonight in Cleveland, liberals will be gathering around their televisions this evening to say goodbye to Jon Stewart. This will be the last edition of *The Daily Show*, and Stewart's exit is equivalent to past television farewells of icons such as Johnny Carson. But while Carson was a seminal figure in American popular culture for decades, Stewart's importance transcends television or even comedy. While the tributes to his supposed brilliance are, at best, overbaked, there should be no doubt that he has influenced our political culture profoundly during his tenure. Indeed, rather than giving him a hard time for his private meetings with the president in the White House that seemed to point toward him being given his marching orders by his political master, what we should be doing is examining the way Stewart influenced Obama.

[As I noted earlier today](#), Obama has been transformed from the post-partisan visionary that enraptured a nation with promises of hope and change into something very different. He is now a man who was unashamed to conduct a serious foreign policy debate employing bitter hyper-partisan rhetoric that seemed straight of Richard Nixon's playbook. But unlike Nixon, Obama didn't merely make an enemies list. He demonized his enemies employing humor. The fact that his nasty lines about Republican critics of the Iran nuclear deal being the equivalent of Iranians chanting "Death to America" got laughs from his campus audience at the American University was no accident.

There is a long and honorable tradition of political humor and satire in the Western canon dating back to Jonathan Swift. But though Stewart's routines were often undeniably funny, his show deserved to be remembered more for deceptive editing of interviews of those whose views he sought to skewer and the softballs he tossed at liberals and Democrats. Though he pretended at times to be above mere partisanship and took shots at easy though non-controversial Democratic targets, he was in a real sense the poet laureate of the Democratic Party in the last decade. The cheap shots in Obama's speech the day before Stewart exited stage left is a symbol but a telling one since it illustrates the way the comedian's style has infected mainstream politics. Whereas in an earlier era it would have been unthinkable for a commander-in-chief to stoop to speak of mainstream political opponents as the moral equivalent of an Iranian mob, this kind of incendiary reference is stereotypical Stewart.

The point about his style is not that it was both funny and unfair, but the way it conveys a sort of not-so-secret handshake among the young and the fashionably liberal. In this world, differing views don't have to be engaged with, let alone disputed. They can, instead, be dismissed with a vicious swipe aimed at conveying the message that anyone who dissents from liberal orthodoxy is beyond contempt.

While the left likes to lament the rise of Fox News, the real engine that has been coarsening our public life is not the existence of a conservative news network to challenge the left-leaning uniformity of all the others. The real blow to civility comes from a mode of discourse that hinges on denigrating those who exist outside of the liberal consensus. Stewart didn't educate his audience about the issues but merely played to their political prejudices. In the new world of debate for which he played the midwife, one doesn't have to struggle with hard choices so much as to merely identify conservative oafs who are to be mocked and to then cue the audience to

laugh. He became famous for attacking CNN's "Crossfire" for promoting partisan argument for its own sake but he helped replace that in our culture with a sort of wink and nod sniggering that makes the worst screaming matches on that show seem like a video edition of Plato's *Republic*. When one considers that political commentary on television began with William F. Buckley's "Firing Line" in the 1960s, it's clear that the decline of the culture isn't so much about liberals and conservatives as it is about the replacement of ideas with a politics of contempt. When one realizes that increasingly large numbers of young viewers get their political news from shows like this, the importance of this sea change cannot be overestimated.

Stewart was in a sense right to dismiss conservatives who [rightly denounced him as an administration flunky](#) when they learned of his secret visits to the White House. While the president may well have been seeking to influence Stewart — something that comic did not dispute — the truth is that the president wasn't so much giving marching orders to his court jester as he was probably gaining insight from him. Stewart didn't need instructions from Obama about how to attack Republicans as much as Obama needed help channeling Stewart's comedy while defending otherwise indefensible policies such as the appeasement of Iran.

Conservatives need to take note of this. Among the most important things the next Republican president will need to win his political battles is a similarly friendly forum where liberals are treated as dolts rather than as challengers with ideas. Seen from that perspective, Stewart deserves the attention he's getting lately. He isn't just a political comic. He's someone who has helped to divide the country in a way that the creators of "Crossfire" never dreamed possible.

## The Federalist

### [Farewell To Jon Stewart, The Left's Donald Trump](#)

***Jon Stewart is the Donald Trump of the Left, only more foolish. At least we all know deep down that Trump doesn't believe anything he says he believes.***

by Bill Morris

I saw one stand-up comedy show during my college career, and I remember one line from it: "It's called masturbation because I'm the master of it, okay?" It was the type of fare you'd expect from a guy who'd done cameo work on Half Baked and Adam Sandler films.

That was Jon Stewart back in the spring of 2005, the tail-end of his pre-Messianic carpenter phase. Billy the 18-year-old penned a review praising him for steering clear of politics and sticking with bipartisan toilet humor that was in vogue thanks to the ascent of Judd Apatow.

Many of my classmates were disappointed with his stand-up routine. They'd come to have their ideology reaffirmed, to hear truth spoken to power, another notion in vogue at the time. I knew Stewart didn't share my beliefs, but bought the ticket anyway. I thought he was funny. Show me a man who didn't snicker when "The Daily Show" debuted "Mess-O-Potamia" or the "Indecision Desk," and I'll show you an ideologue. That's exactly what Stewart became. It's served him well monetarily, but not culturally.

Apatow's frat boy toilet humor went out of style, but he quickly replaced it with sorority toilet humor. Stewart replaced his truth-to-power brand with fealty. His most recent gag lines have



been about the Republican ability to “[undercut our president](#),” while comparing freshman senators to dictators for not deferring to the Iran deal.

Stewart’s swan song from the host’s chair at “The Daily Show” is being greeted with everything from sentimental hagiography to solipsistic despair, and yes, lamentations from Salon that he “felt like a Messiah,” a “better white savior than any of us had a right to expect.”

“It’s time for us to stop asking more from him than any one person can be expected to give,” Jeopardy champion Arthur Chu writes. Substitute L. Ron Hubbard for Jon Stewart, and you have a John Travolta op-ed.

## **Jon Stewart Begins Pulling His Punches**

When Stewart first rushed onto the scene of renegade, devil-may-care truth-telling, the zeitgeist of the day demanded howling lamentations of soundbite politics. Stewart is the chief pioneer of soundbite humor, the news of the day broken into out-of-context eight-second clips followed by three to five minutes of the host making funny faces and sighing loudly as each one plays.

‘The Daily Show’ did not become a staple of the zeitgeist’s diet until election day 2004, when Stewart bawled at his desk because voters re-elected George W. Bush.

It’s the comedic equivalent of saying “ugh,” of Popsicle-stick one-liners, only less original. It was built for our SEO-fueled, clickbait-laden age. Stewart may despise the “Watch Jon Stewart DEMOLISH Idaho’s Infamous Homophobic, Bigoted, Sexist, Cis-Gendered Republican County Dog Catcher” headlines that accompany each one of his segments, but those headlines have been routine for nearly a decade and the show has never deviated from its formula.

“The Daily Show” did not become a staple of the zeitgeist’s diet until election day 2004, when Stewart bawled at his desk because voters re-elected George W. Bush. It soon became apparent that Stewart regretted running the video of John Kerry zig-zagging downhill with a voiceover noting the Democratic nominee’s flip-flops: “I was for the Iraq War, now I’m against the Iraq War,” Stewart said. Yes, it was funny, just as funny as his diatribes against Donald Rumsfeld and Bush, but it was too effective. By 2005, Stewart seemed to be pulling his punches, although he still criticized Democrats for their foolishness. Dick Durbin’s comparison of Bush and Hitler inspired a masterful takedown of [Godwin’s Law](#).

“Please stop calling people Hitler when you disagree with them. It demeans you. It demeans your opponent. And, to be honest, it demeans Hitler. He worked too many years, too hard to be that evil to have every Tom, Dick, and Harry come along and say ‘Yeah, you’re being Hitler.’ No. You know who was Hitler—Hitler,” [he said](#).

Election day 2006 marked the turning point. Upon seeing his effectiveness at swinging voters and driving youth turnout, he made a conscious decision to adopt the inverse of Ronald Reagan’s Eleventh Commandment: Thou shalt not criticize a Democrat. Never again did he speak truth to power. He catered to it, slamming the powerful for not exercising more power. The withering monologues were replaced with mere sighs at the stupidity of those who didn’t agree with Barack Obama.

## **Jon Stewart’s Dishonest Editing**

If this was commentary, it was [WWE commentary](#) complete with fabricated storylines and DEVASTATING PULVERIZATION of straw men. The mask came off when guests began

publicizing Stewart's tactics for tickling the liberal ego. First came Jonah Goldberg's infamous segment, in which the heroic "Daily Show" editing crew condensed 20 minutes of Stewart getting embarrassed for not bothering to read the book that left him reflexively offended into six minutes of Goldberg shouting.

Producers routinely lie to pre-taped interview subjects, deny requests for raw footage and witnesses, and dictate to guests the exact narrative Stewart wants on his program.

"Stewart's complaint echoed all over the Web, radio and TV by other critics, is that books can indeed be judged by the cover. And because the title ["Liberal Fascism"] and cover amount to a giant insult to liberals (only Stewart didn't use the word 'insult'), it can be dismissed out of hand," Goldberg [wrote](#).

At least Goldberg had a studio audience bearing witness to his "Daily Show" experience. Producers routinely [lie to pre-taped interview subjects](#), deny requests for [raw footage and witnesses](#), and [dictate to guests the exact narrative](#) Stewart wants on his program.

That's exactly what Stewart did to former Libertarian presidential nominee Wayne Allen Root when it aired a segment of him bashing the Internal Revenue Service for profiling Tea Party groups while seemingly defending racial profiling that he'd spent his career condemning.

"When the interviewer asked the 3 guests for their opinion of me...all 3 said something nice. The director said, 'Cut. C'mon guys. This is supposed to be funny. Please say something funny or negative about Wayne. Like 'rich white guy' or 'Fox News guy.' And then they turned the camera back on...and each guest said something negative about me," [Root said in an email to Reason](#).

No wonder Stewart hasn't addressed the month-long Planned Parenthood organ harvesting story—he couldn't parrot the "heavily edited" line without coming across as a fraud and hypocrite, "The Daily Show's" only mortal sins.

## **What Distinguished Jon Stewart from Other Comedians**

Stewart stood out amidst the other satirists of his day in one major respect: character. Colbert affected Bill O'Reilly to parody the Right. Sasha Baron Cohen donned stereotypical hip-hop gear to make buffoons out of his guests. Each maintained character, affording guests the opportunity to defend themselves. Stewart granted no such quarter.

Stewart's entire shtick is the equivalent of Bruce Jenner insulting someone's manhood and screaming, 'You can't hit me—I'm a woman.'

Colbert and Cohen left their opponents room to defend themselves against caricatured imbeciles. Stewart edited footage to be as embarrassing as possible and, when called out on it, donned a clown nose to dodge accountability. His self-deprecating cartoon space-man voice and claims of being "just a comedian" were cudgel and shield. His entire shtick is the equivalent of Bruce Jenner insulting someone's manhood and screaming, "You can't hit me—I'm a woman."

Colbert respected the intelligence of his opponents. Sure, liberals would have an easier time handling softballs, but the rules of the game were clear. Not so in Stewart's world. There was only one rule: demolish your enemies.

In one of Stewart's most famous interviews, he laid into then-presidential contender Sen. John McCain for courting the support of students at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University after calling Falwell an "agent of intolerance" during his 2000 run.

"Are you going into crazy base world?" Stewart asked, condescension dripping. He never recognized that if you sit at the table of politics and you can't spot the person in "crazy base world," you're it. Stewart is the Donald Trump of the Left, only more foolish; at least we all know deep down that Trump doesn't believe anything he says he believes.

### **Being Kind to Anthony Weiner Before Being Cruel**

Stewart became the political animal that he so reviled when he first decided to pursue his calling as a Very Serious Funnyman. It's a shame. Fans rightfully point to the 9/11 monologue as the essence of the humanity at the center of the show's appeal, but I was struck by a far more controversial segment as proof: his reluctance to jump on Anthony Weiner's Twitter controversy. After weeks of silence, Stewart laid out for viewers why he had avoided addressing this comedic gift from God.

Stewart may have helped create the politicized life of comedy in which we are all now held hostage, but he wouldn't succumb to it then, for the sake of a friendship.

"Here's my dilemma: One, we, news-based comedy program, are looking at a story about a snapshot that appears to be an ample helping of penis allegedly posted by a congressman whose name is a synonym for penis. I mean for a program like this, the phrase 'sweet spot' springs to mind," [he said](#). "The cons of this story are that this is my friend Anthony...As a comedian this is slam dunk...but as a friend I really hope that this story is untrue."

The jokes were relatively tame and obvious. He used the occasion to focus more on shrinkage in the chilly waters of the Atlantic during his summers on Dewey Beach with anonymous idealist Anthony Weiner. "It can't be," he says, as he cuts to a commercial break.

Conservatives hammered him for dodging the scandal because Weiner was an uber liberal and frequent guest on the program. He engaged in some requisite "doubts about its veracity" because of Andrew Breitbart, but it's hard to come away from the clip with any other conclusion than that Stewart was genuinely concerned about his friend's marriage and mental health. Stewart may have helped create the politicized life of comedy in which we are all now held hostage, but he wouldn't succumb to it then, for the sake of a friendship. It was all rather touching.

Fast-forward to Weiner's disastrous mayoral candidacy, and we see Stewart the political hack doing what any political hack does: throwing his friend under the bus. "There's that charm that borders on the edge of dickishness. It's Anthony Weiner, former congressman turned amateur photographer," [he says, with the trademark spin of his papers](#) before lambasting Weiner for affecting a parody Jamaican accent—rich, given his recent controversy over a Herman Cain impersonation.

I still think Jon Stewart's capable of being funny. His audience of the past few years has been young people trying to seem sophisticated and 40-somethings trying to feel hip. If anything else, "The Daily Show" provided cougars and their prey something to talk about. Maybe he can return to form in retirement and make jokes about Onanism instead of the intellectual masturbation he's been peddling for a decade.

*Bill Morris is a staff writer for the Washington Free Beacon. He previously worked at the Franklin Center for Government and Public Integrity, where he was managing editor of Old Dominion Watchdog.*



# JON STEWART

Earns \$15 million per year  
condemns Romney for being rich

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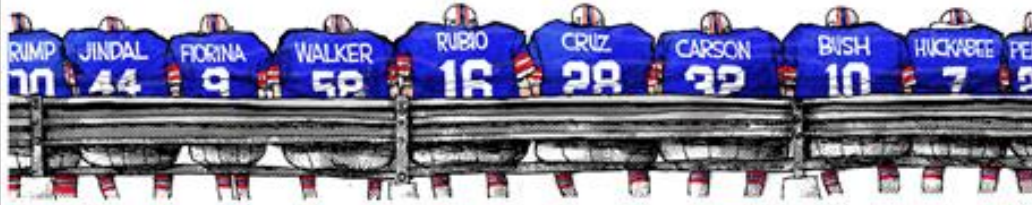
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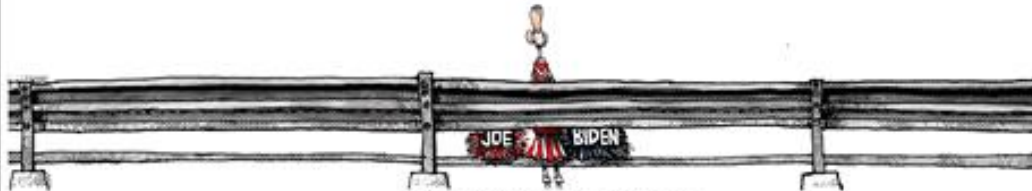


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