

# We're as Mad as Hell ... and You Know the Rest

✘ Dick Metcalf was “one of the country’s pre-eminent gun journalists,” as a page one story in the New York Times described him. He wrote the feature column for Guns & Ammo, the popular magazine for gun enthusiasts. He also did a television show.

Not long ago Metcalf wrote a column under the headline, “Let’s Talk Limits.” about the gun debate. In it he said, “The fact is all constitutional rights are regulated, always have been and need to be.” To many Americans that’s hardly a controversial statement. To many gun people, it’s treasonous.

So after his column was published, the Times tells us that, “readers threatened to cancel their subscriptions. Death threats poured in by mail. His television program was pulled from the air.”

Turns out that two major gun manufacturers called Metcalf’s editor and told him “in no uncertain terms” they could no longer do business with the company that publishes the magazine and produces the TV show if Metcalf worked there.

That’s when he was fired.

Welcome to our brave new world where you can’t even call for a discussion about guns – or a hundred other topics – without the lynch mob coming after you.

When I read the Times’ story I thought about an issue that keeps popping up in my commentary: The polarization of America. We’re at a point now where neither side in any controversial debate, whether it’s about guns or anything else, wants to hear what the other side has to say. Neither side even likes the other side. So we seal ourselves off from

opinions we don't want to hear. We impose a kind of apartheid based not on skin color but ideology.

We go to the Internet and cable TV and talk radio to get our already entrenched views validated, not to learn anything. This is not good for America.

Yes, the two sides, left and right, have deeply held beliefs and legitimate differences, differences about the size and role of government, about our foreign policy, and many other issues. But not every issue is worth going to war over. But more and more that's what we do. Cable TV, talk radio and the Internet can take a story about littering and blow it up into World War III.

The Internet, cable TV and talk radio didn't start the fire. They didn't create the polarization and nastiness. But they happily provide the battlefield where the two sides can go to war non-stop 24 hours a day. And the result shouldn't surprise us: more polarization and more anger. That may be good for business but it's not good for the country.

Those media platforms, of course, have also done a lot of good. They give outsiders (like me) a seat at the table and let them have a say in the national conversation. The old media – the networks and the big city newspapers – have guards at the door and are careful about who they let in to express an opinion. (My first book *Bias*, which went after the so-called mainstream media, was the number one book in the country, but no network showed the slightest interest in having me on to talk about it.) And cable and talk radio and the Internet play up the kinds of news stories that the so-called mainstream media either downplay or flat out ignore. They deserve our thanks for that.

But they also give voice to chuckleheads who honestly think Barack Obama is as bad as Hitler, or on what used to be liberal radio, that George Bush was behind the 9/11 attack on

America. Thanks to the Internet and talk radio people who couldn't write a coherent letter to the editor can tear down their "enemies" – using some dopey made up name – with half truths and flat out lies. They can be vulgar. Talk radio doesn't allow F-bombs, but no one is going to confuse what goes on there with a Mensa meeting.

The left thinks big business is out to destroy us. The right thinks big government will cause our downfall. Too many Americans feel powerless. That's when they get angry, and maybe a little paranoid.

I'm pretty sure a lot of gun people feel powerless. They think the government is out to take their guns away. That's why they went after Dick Metcalf, the gun journalist.

That's also why evangelical Christians went after A&E when they suspended Phil Robertson for what in my view was his needlessly nasty anti-gay rant. Millions and millions of us are as mad as hell and we're not going to take it anymore.

Sometimes I envy those Americans who don't care all that much about politics. They're less polarized and less angry, I suspect, than the folks who are hooked on cable news and talk radio and who surf the hard right or hard left sites on the web. Maybe they're "low information" voters who don't know what's going on. But I'll bet they're not perpetually angry. I'll bet they don't think much about how polarized we are because that's not a problem in their lives. And I'm guessing they're less paranoid too.