

TV Commentators Provoke Extremism

Michael Kleen

Daily Eastern News

October 17, 2006

In our digital age the 24-hour news networks (FOX, CNN, MSNBC) have come to dominate how Americans see their own country and the world. Through the filter of pundits and commentators, the information you see 24 hours a day is disseminated by a select few. Unfortunately, rational discussion or objective reporting is not in the personal or financial interests of those few. Under the guise of "opinion," commentators like Glenn Beck, Bill O'Reilly, and Nancy Grace compete to whip up the public into a frenzy of outrage, thus increasing their number of viewers and their ad revenue.

Unfortunately, that outrage has consequences. Aside from making our newscasters appear insane to the outside world, the pundit's vitriolic statements push public opinion to the extreme, regardless of their political persuasion.

When Nancy Grace, a former prosecutor who the Georgia Supreme Court once admonished for "her disregard of the notions of due process and fairness," screams on nationally broadcast television that an accused person is guilty of a crime months before the trial gets underway, justice seems to be tossed out the window.

Or when Glenn Beck declares World War 3 is upon us, suggests that if Islamic fundamentalists take over in the Middle East "we're going to have to nuke the whole place," and "that's the only way to defeat extreme evil, to wipe it out completely," he clearly encourages the public to adopt the very extremist attitude he feels so repulsed by.

Or when Bill O'Reilly states that the "forces of secularism" will "destroy America as we know it," and that the ACLU is the most dangerous organization in the United States, he is attacking both reason and an important protector of our civil liberties.

Millions of people in the United States rely on these news networks for information, giving the pundits powerful podiums with which to spread their personal views. Instead of using those podiums to encourage reasoned discussion, discourse, and rational decision making, they rant and rave against all kinds of perceived injustices without any regard for the consequences of their words.

Unlike what Glenn Beck said on his radio show on August 10th, we do not need to be "the first ones in the recruitment office lining up to shoot the bad Muslims in the head." We need to calm down and stop reporting that the world is coming to an end, that danger lurks in every corner, that our children shouldn't leave the house anymore, and that our justice system is failing because it gives people rights. We need reasonable people on the 24-hour news networks that call for reasonable solutions. I hope that one day those who use cable television to urge the public to take extreme measures are held accountable if those measures are taken.