



## Episode 1,735: Dave Rubin on How Political Disagreement Became Semi-Warfare

Guest: Dave Rubin

**WOODS:** Love the book and glad to have you back from off the grid for a little while. And let's get talking about it right with the very, very beginning, the dedication to Ben Affleck. When I got to the dedication page, I thought that's a very puzzling dedication. Then I got to the chapter that accounts for it, and ah, okay. But it's very revealing. I don't think this is not just an isolated case. This is a case that's very revealing and tells us a lot about society and the kinds of issues we're facing. Can you just set the stage first and explain how Ben Affleck came to have this book dedicated to him?

**RUBIN:** Sure. The reaction to dedicating the book to Ben Affleck was almost worth the price of admission because the reaction that I've gotten from people, because either people absolutely knew why I did it, my longtime audience that has been through a similar political evolution as I have, or people had no idea. So to be very clear, I do not know Ben Affleck, I have never met Ben Affleck. I did not think of Ben Affleck as a particularly good Batman.

But the reason I dedicated the book to Ben Affleck was because, you may remember this, it was about six years ago now. I think it's about six years ago, almost to the week. Sam Harris, the neuroscientist and now well-known atheist and sort of a guy who's into spirituality without religion – his last book was called *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion*. He was on *Real Time with Bill Maher* to promote that very book actually, and Sam was on the same side of the table as Bill. And for those of your audience or your listeners who don't know that much about *Real Time*, when you're sitting on the same side as Bill, that's sort of a protected interview sort of, so it's supposed to be kind of a one-on-one where you can just focus with Bill, as opposed to the panel where there's the three guests on the other side of the table and that's where they're doing the back-and-forth and debating each other and everything else.

So Bill, who obviously is an atheist, and Sam who's an atheist, they're talking about atheism, and they're talking about religion and belief, and then they bring up Islam. And Sam tries to, as he would put it, unpack the idea that, of course, yeah, as in every religion, there are people who take it very devoutly. Then there are radicals. In this case, there are jihadists, there are nominal Muslims, all the things that we all know to be true that in no way is bigoted. And really what they were talking about is the idea that you have to separate ideas from people. So you want to be able to criticize any set of ideas, but you shouldn't be bigoted towards people. So you could criticize a political platform, the Democratic Party platform or the Republican Party platform, and that doesn't mean you hate all Republicans or Democrats, just the same way that you can criticize the ideas of the Old Testament. That doesn't make

you an anti-Semite. Or if you criticize the ideas of the Quran, that shouldn't make you an islamophobe, which isn't even a real word, but that's a whole other issue.

Long story short, Affleck heard this, and he did exactly what almost sort of every modern leftist does when faced with an uncomfortable truth. He got red in the face. He started pounding on the table. He was angry. He was huffing and puffing. And in effect, he called Bill Maher and Sam Harris "gross and racist." That was the line that really caught on. And suddenly, everywhere, Huffington Post, *Daily Beast*, Mediaite, all the usual suspects, were calling Bill Maher and Sam Harris, these two guys who have who have always stood for true liberalism, that no one would say they're conservative, no one would say they're on the right, suddenly everyone's calling them a racist.

And that moment for me, I had been thinking about this for a long time, about what was wrong with the left – which I considered to be my side and I was on the Young Turks at the time – and that moment was such a crystal-clear example of what I had seen, the sort of intellectual rot that I had seen, that had replaced debate, and in effect the sort of overly emotive nonsense that had replaced debate on the left. And that instance was such a crystal-clear example of it, that really, I credited it as my political awakening. I had a few other moments that I go into in the book, but I really credit Ben Affleck, because if he hadn't been an A-list movie star acting like a petulant child, maybe my wake up wouldn't have happened as cleanly or as quickly.

**WOODS:** Well, that kind of episode has of course been replicated in many contexts, many situations, and what we see generally in a case like that is, again, not really an engagement with ideas, but more a *You're a this and you're a that and you're saying this*. And I like when they tell me what I'm saying. I'm the expert at what I'm saying. You don't have to tell me what I'm saying.

But what I want to know is: it does seem to be one-sided. So let's say, if you go on a show with somebody, if you go on Hugh Hewitt's show, let's say, you disagree with him, he's not going to say, *Well, you're just a* or *You're a this or that*. He is going to try to engage with you on the merits. And I guess what I want to know is why do you think – I don't think that's some crazy theory. I think it's clearly one-sided –

**RUBIN:** No, I think there's a fundamental reason for that, and I go into it a little bit in the book, but really, it's been since the book that I've been able to flesh through this further because I've been doing so many interviews, and I get some version of that question. And I think it's a great question, and I really do think there is a reason.

And let me preface it by saying, in this book, I take several positions that are not thought of as positions of the right. I take a pro-choice position. Now, you would think that pro-choice, the abortion topic, for most people on the right, that is like the biggest no-no. You don't touch it; we're pro-life. That's it. I have gotten nothing – and I mean this literally – nothing but love and praise from people on the right about my book. And you know what? The ones that are frustrated with me about abortion, they say, *Hey, Dave, we're going to agree to disagree, and I enjoyed the book and I'm going to share it, and you gave me something to think about*. That's what I get from people on the right.

Now, on the left, even though I take some positions that are thought of as lefty positions, I get nothing but hate. So the fundamental reason for it, I believe to be this: that if you're on

the right, let's say, especially if you're a libertarian, you're an old-school classical liberal, you're a conservative, what's the undergirding of that? Well, what sits under those labels is that you believe in individual rights. You believe that everyone in a free society that is legally part of that society should have the exact same rights, regardless of their skin color or gender or sexuality or any of that other immutable nonsense. And then of course, that's guarded by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. And then we can talk about the marginal places where, say, conservatives and libertarians disagree on things. Those are more public policy things. But the basis is individual rights. That's a pretty good bedrock to start with.

Now, on the left, it is very unclear to me what the bedrock principle is other than government, meaning, I think the best example of this is when Bernie Sanders says \$15 minimum wage. Now, Bernie's never employed anybody, he's never run a business. He's become rich off being a politician while he praises socialism. But Bernie just picks a number, right? It has no economic basis. And you know this and most of your audience knows this. I'm a small businessman. I mean, if I want to hire somebody, what right does the government have to tell me how much I can pay them? I get plenty of people that offer to work for me for free. Now, I pay all my interns, but the idea that the government should come in and tell me what I should pay people is a crazy – it's not economically sound, and I don't think it's ethical or moral or anything else.

But in essence, because they don't have a bedrock principle like individual rights, Bernie says, okay, \$15 minimum wage, and then people think there's some sort of moral heft to it, that that's just right, he wants to help poor people. Because you don't have to think about it. It sort of sounds right. But then what happens after that is a few weeks later – and this actually happened – Rasheeda Talib who is a member of the Squad, I think one of the worst congresswomen we have in the country, she said no, it should be \$20. And then you hear other progressives say, no, 25, 35, whatever. And the point is that because there's no bedrock principle, they're always looking to out-govern themselves. So Bernie feels moral by saying \$15. It's not based on anything. And then Rashida just says, well, Bernie just made up a number, so I'm going to even make up a bigger number because that will make me even more good. I will be even more for poor people. So I think that's the fundamental difference.

And then that also, to quote Ben Shapiro, is why the line "Facts don't care about your feelings" caught on the way that it did, because they're basing all of their policies basically on how they feel about something, not what is morally right or empirically true or economically sound. It's just, *Oh, I feel that I should help poor people, so he said, 15; I'll say 20*. And then that's why they're so emotional about it all the time, because they can't back up the argument with anything other than how they feel about it. So I think that's really like the big piece that if a lot of people could understand, I think it would help them deal with the overly emotional people.

**WOODS:** I think there are some people who would have tried to say that people on the right, so-called, would be just as intolerant if they weren't on the outs, basically, if they were in the cultural saddle, so to speak. And so just to play devil's advocate here, I mean, you talk in your book about coming out of the closet. Now, if you had done that, let's say in 1950 when cultural conservatism was very much in the saddle, well, your life would have been ruined the way these professors who, let's say, say the wrong thing in a class, they have their lives ruined today. Why isn't that the same thing?

**RUBIN:** Well, that's why my book is fighting for liberalism. I'm fighting for liberalism, and liberalism inherently fights for equality for all people. I think that's the best thing that a society can do. I think that's really the only thing that government should be doing, and I think it's the best thing that government can do.

But you're absolutely right. These things are cyclical, and it depends who's in the seat of power and who's on the outs culturally and who's good – I mean, look, let's not forget that it's only 20 years ago that Republicans were leading the charge in the Senate to get *Mortal Kombat* banned out of video game stores because they felt it was too violent, which the violence in *Mortal Kombat* of 1994 pales in comparison to what's going on now. But there's never been a study that's proven that video game violence leads to actual violence. In fact, there have been studies that prove the reverse, that it actually helps let people let off steam. So it's not to say that conservatives have always lived up to the principles of equal rights, of individual rights. But it is to say that the bedrock there does make some sense.

And then I think what happens is, and I know you come from this from a more libertarian side, is that conservatives, there's an attachment to religion there that I think has been at times really at odds with some of their other small government principles. So they're suddenly in people's bedrooms. And I think there's interesting religious arguments of why you would be against gay marriage, let's say. But look, as long as somebody is not trying to legislate my life, I don't care.

And I would also say that you have to give credit where credit is due. Ten years ago, virtually nobody in mainstream was for gay marriage, including Bill Clinton, including Barack Obama, including Joe Biden. And in ten years, virtually everyone in the public life, in the public sphere of America is for gay marriage. Donald Trump is the first president to run pro-gay marriage on his first turn. Barack Obama didn't even do that. So conservatives have changed. That's not to say they've dropped all of their religious beliefs, but I think they're holding them more as their personal religious beliefs rather than their public policy. I see that as a good thing.

**WOODS:** I've got you for only so much time, so I want to go on to your chapter where you reassure people that you're not actually a Nazi. And it's funny that you have to write that chapter. I mean, I know that you can find conservatives who said that Barack Obama was a communist, but I never went in for any of that, because obviously, he was just a regular center-left politician. That was what he was. It's obvious he's not any one of these – he's very, very much within the parameters of the American establishment, and he would not go farther than that.

But there are people who take it very seriously. They're not just saying this because they're going a little over the top against people they disagree with. There are people who really think that we're like on the verge of a Nazi takeover and there are Nazis all over the place. I don't see that even slightly. And if that were the case, that if I take these people seriously, then what they're really saying is that the Nazis really weren't so bad after all. They wanted some tariffs or they were obnoxious, but otherwise they weren't that bad.

**RUBIN:** Yeah, that's a great point because it shows you how everything that these people do erases history. We throw around the term *Nazi* so casually or these people in the media call Trump Hitler so casually, that not only did Hitler kill 6 million Jews, but you know 20-some-odd other million people died and 10 million Russians and all sorts of things, and a world war

was fought over this and everything else. The idea that there are Nazis in America that somehow are pulling the levers of power or that white supremacy is like an intrinsic piece of the United States is crazy. I don't know that there's a country in the history of the world that started with slavery that got rid of it so quickly. We fought a civil war to get rid of it. It doesn't mean everything's perfect, but why does everyone still want to come to America and nobody leaves? Even the people who run around telling you what a racist, evil, patriarchy, capitalist, awful system we have, they don't leave, because there's nowhere better.

And the few times that you'll hear Bernie and the socialists, they'll talk about, *Well, Sweden. We should be more likely Sweden*, and it's like, all right, well, you really can't compare us because they're an absolutely tiny country. I think it's about 10 million people, if that. We're a country of I think around 350 million people. We have a completely diverse group of people from every walk on Earth. They had until the last ten years basically a homogenous white society, which I thought the lefties were supposed to be against. And in the last ten years when they've brought in immigrants from the Middle East, now they have huge, huge problems and are basically Europe's leader in terrorism. So nothing that these people really say is true.

And the problem is – and I said this. You can find a video that I did the day after Trump was elected. Before he was sworn in, so it was November of 2016, the day after he was elected, I did a video where I said, look, nobody thought this thing was going to happen, but here it is. And what I would recommend to my friends on the left – and at that time, I still considered myself a lefty. I said, I think we have to take a step back because by calling Trump and by calling all of his supporters Nazis, it's not just what we're doing to them. It's what we're doing to ourselves, because if suddenly the guy that you're calling Hitler starts doing some good things, and Trump has done some good things, then you can't be like, *Oh, that Hitler guy, he's not that bad*.

And I think that's in many ways why the left is so absolutely hysterical right now. There is a lot of good things happening right now, and that's despite the riots and the pandemic. There are good things happening in the world. Even just before I jumped on the line with you, I saw that now it sounds like Bahrain and Israel are about to sign a peace accord. I mean, I thought we were all for Middle East peace, but now because it has something to do with Trump, we're supposed to be against it. And I think that's the danger. If you label somebody the worst thing in the world, you give yourself no wiggle room if they don't turn out to be that. And instead, you've just got to double down on it endlessly.

**WOODS:** Let's talk fake news. I was glad to see that you spent some time on this Covington Catholic High School thing, and that whole episode in Washington, DC, that guy Nathan Phillips, he's just a conman. He went on CNN and said the exact opposite of what happened. You mentioned that the Black Hebrew Israelites, they were the ones shouting obscenities and insults not just at the students, but at Native Americans. They were saying: you Native Americans deserve to lose your land because you were worshipping the wrong gods. So Nathan Phillips comes along and thinks, *Gee, we've got these high school students standing there, obviously minding their own business, and then we have these racists who are saying that my people deserve to be dispossessed. Which group should I go up and confront? He confronts the students*.

**RUBIN:** It's such a perfect story, because if you only care about immutable characteristics, it doesn't matter what anyone's doing, what anyone's saying; you have to pick your good guys

and bad guys in advance. So who's your good guy in this story? Well, it has to be the Native American, right?

**WOODS:** Of course.

**RUBIN:** It has to be the Native American. And then who's the other good guy? Well, it has to be the black guys. And who's the obvious bad guy? Well, it has to be the young, white Christian male. And that's why one of the things I say in the book is if the story seems too perfect, if it fits the narrative too well, it probably is fake. And that's why we've had the Jesse Smollett story and a whole series of other stories like this, because the media loves, loves, loves, loves these stories. Let's not forget when the Jesse Smollett thing happened, you had Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer and AOC and the rest of them all tweeting about how this proves, *this proves* what a racist society America is. And then guess what: it was all a hoax. It was all a hoax.

So when you see the anger that's out on the streets, when you see Antifa and Black Lives Matter wanting to burn the system down, it shouldn't surprise you. Only think back — I know it feels like a lifetime ago, but just think back to the Democratic primaries. Was anyone on that stage or any of those stages saying anything remotely positive about America? And the answer basically is no. There were tiny moments where Pete Buttigieg might say something nice about America and Biden a little bit. I think he said the word *constitution* once. But the rest of them, the entire party platform — it's not even the party platform. The entire ethos of all of these people is that this thing is evil and wrong, and if only we give them the power, they can fix it. And it's so backwards and deeply dangerous.

**WOODS:** Okay, one thing you said there involves how you spot fake news, because that's one of the chapters. And clearly — and that's what I was going to say. Clearly when the story is just too darn perfect, it does not pass the smell test. And by the way, it's not to say that there might not occasionally be a story that does fit the narrative. I mean, once in a while, anything can happen. But when it's so perfect, at least sit there for a few hours or wait for the footage to come up. I sat there, when I found out that there was almost two hours' worth of footage of what actually happened, I was so drawn into this story that I sat there and watch that whole video footage, because I thought there's got to be a shred of truth to what these people are saying [laughing].

**RUBIN:** No, but it doesn't matter. This is what the media does. They find something, they feel it fits what they want to push, and you know, most journalists are not journalists anymore. You have to put air quotes when you say "journalists." They're activists. And I think that this is Trump's greatest strength. Trump somehow — and I don't know if it's from decades of being in a tough business, which is the world of construction and hotels and building in New York City and Jersey and dealing with a lot of tough characters over there — but somehow he saw what most people on the right can't see or are unable to deal with, which is that when you're a Republican or you're someone on the right, it's not just that you're fighting the Democrats. You're fighting the Democrats and the media. And Trump said I will fight both of them the way I want to fight them, as opposed to the other Republicans who would probably be decent people like Mitt Romney and John McCain, but guess what: they didn't win.

And it's not that life is only about winning, but I think Trump has proven a point here, which is you've got to be kind of dirty. When I interviewed Ted Cruz, I even said that to Cruz. I said, do you think Trump, the reason that this works is because he's willing to do stuff that you

wouldn't do? And Cruz in effect said yes. And Cruz is a Trump supporter, obviously. He's been one of his biggest advocates, even though they really got into it four years ago. So I think that's just what Trump sees that I think has been a net good for most people, because now we're all sort of starting to see it.

**WOODS:** All right, here's a kind of a meta kind of question.

**RUBIN:** Sure.

**WOODS:** I want to know what your call to action is, because sometimes like I'll watch a documentary, and the documentary really makes me interested in the subject, and then the credits roll and that's the end of it. I want at the end of a documentary, I want them to tell me what they want me to do now that I know this stuff, you know what I mean? What is my next step as the viewer? So likewise, as a reader of your book, what is my next step? What's your call to action to me?

**RUBIN:** Well, the bumper sticker answer is sort of how I end the book, and it's also the subtitle the book, which is that I really just want you to think for yourself. But that's not – you want *action* action. So thinking for yourself is the first step. I lay out all of my positions in there. You don't have to agree with all of them, but I hope you come to logical conclusions on your own, and if you end up disagreeing – I lay out an argument for a flat tax. If you're not into that, so be it, but I hope you've thought about it now.

Now, I would say really in terms of what people can do right now, look, I live in LA. I live in California. We are taxed out the wazoo. We are over-regulated. We have crappy roads and homeless people everywhere and there's a drug problem now and all sorts of stuff. It's also been Democrat-run for decades, just like most of the cities that you see burning, Portland, Seattle, etc. So what can you do? I mean, it's an odd thing for a former lefty to say, but I think you basically have to vote out pretty much every Democrat.

That is not in a full-throated endorsement of every Republican by any stretch, but the Democratic Party has to in effect be destroyed, so that maybe a phoenix can rise out of it, out of the ashes. But you've got to vote these people out. Vote people out who get everything wrong, and then blame everybody else. I mean, show me a Democrat policy that makes sense. Chicago has the strictest gun laws in the nation. What city has the highest amount of gun deaths? Chicago. It's like we could go through a million examples of this sort of thing.

And then somehow because of the media, it's like we end up blaming the Republicans or blaming Trump for problems that apparently have been going on – not *apparently* – problems that in fact have been going on for decades and decades. So I think I just think the modern Democratic Party must be destroyed. The new crew of socialists or whatever you want to call them, they need to be put back at the kids' table, and then hopefully some decent, true liberals, JFK-style liberals, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Ed Koch-style liberals can come back. But that's really the only way that I see something decent coming out of this.

**WOODS:** All right, let's wrap up with something, maybe we can get some optimism. I don't know. I don't know.

**RUBIN:** I'll try. I'll try.

**WOODS:** Okay, because right now, when there's a contentious issue, like Kyle Rittenhouse or the virus or the Covington Catholic thing, you could – I don't know if you've ever seen this Facebook page Now This, and it's all left-wing –

**RUBIN:** Yeah, I see them on Twitter every now and again.

**WOODS:** Yeah, right. Yeah, yeah. So they watched exactly the same video I did of Sandmann, and they conclude that he's a terrible person.

**RUBIN:** Yep.

**WOODS:** And they watched exactly the same video. People are watching the same video about Kyle Rittenhouse. Some people say he's a freedom fighter, and other people say he's a domestic terrorist. We've got this virus. We have data you can look at, and we have some people drawing one conclusion, some people drawing completely opposite conclusions, and then demonizing each other. What are the prospects for thinking non-tribally, thinking for yourself, and restoring civil discourse? It looks like we're going absolutely in the other direction.

**RUBIN:** Well, I think one of the things that we've got going on right now is that we're in a war on reality. It's as simple as that. You're right. Some people watch one thing and they automatically see what they want to see. Some people do it on the other side. Some people can somehow magically not see the parts they don't want to see and the rest of it.

And what I'm worried about – and I think the election and the day after the election is going to be almost like the prime example of this – is that it doesn't matter whether you think – let's say Trump wins by two points and Biden wins by two points; Trump wins in a landslide, Biden wins in a landslide. Well, if you've only gotten your news from one side for so long, you're not going to believe anything. And I think we're so divided in the information war, in the Matrix let's say, that reality and how we're going to be able to function going forward, that's really what's up for debate right now, because we're living in very different worlds.

Just before I joined the call with you this morning, I watched a video of a black woman on a plane screaming at other passengers and telling people what white privilege they have and all this. And they just sort of sit there and take it. And it's like, wow, that woman lives in a very, very different world. She sees the world very, very differently than I do.

And we've got to figure out – if we are to remain in the United States of America, we've got to figure out how to get us all – not all of us, but we've got to get a place where the majority of us are able to say, okay, we can agree to disagree. But that's the part that's slipping away real fast. And I don't know exactly what the answer on that is.

**WOODS:** Well, that is hard. But I mean, all we can hope for is that people of goodwill prevail. I mean, what else can you do? And in your own personal life, just lead by example. That's the only person you know for a fact you can influence, is yourself. And just try and bring that to all your interactions. And maybe you're not going to change the minds of people who can't stand the sight of you, but you can be a good example to people who are on the fence or confused or just ordinary people. That's at least a start, just be good yourself, right? What else can you do?

**RUBIN:** That's it, man. I mean, look, that's a very libertarian, sort of bottom-up version of what society should be. Start with yourself. What was Jordan Peterson saying? Clean your room. Instead of cleaning the world, clean your room. If you take care of yourself, well, then you might find that suddenly you're helping to take care of the people around you. And next thing you know, that's going to your neighbors, and next thing you know that's going to your local community, and it's growing and growing and growing, as opposed to top-down, which generally never works.

**WOODS:** Well, the book is *Don't Burn This Book: Thinking for Yourself in the Age of Unreason*, linking to it at [TomWoods.com/1735](https://TomWoods.com/1735). I know you're extremely busy guy, Dave, and I'm really glad we had a chance to talk today. Thanks so much.

**RUBIN:** Tom, I'm glad we got to catch up. Take care.