



Dan Baum's 'Gun Guys' produce quite a conversation, leaving lasting impression

By [Bill Eichenberger](#)

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In his thoroughly entertaining and provocative "Gun Guys: A Road Trip," Dan Baum -- author of the acclaimed "Nine Lives: Death and Life in New Orleans" and a former staff writer for The New Yorker -- sets off on a cross-country search for gun guys. It's a valuable quest, he explains in his prologue, because "gun owners were . . . almost are half our population -- worth knowing because their enthusiasm for firearms said something about us as a people, worth listening to because nothing lasting or decent could happen in gun policy without them."

In Baum, the gun guys find an unlikely ally. He is a liberal, a Democrat, a journalist. But he has loved guns since he first shot a rifle at summer camp in New York state and has collected them -- from most of the conflicts of the last 100-plus years -- his entire adult life. He, too, is a gun guy.

On the road, Baum talks to a wide variety of gun owners: a teenager obsessed with violent video games and his new AR-15, victims of crime who take up carrying concealed guns for protection, and lederhosen-wearing Cincinnatians who celebrate their German heritage and firearms annually at the Schutzenfest.

Many (though certainly not all) of his interview subjects are pleased to be given a forum to discuss their love for guns, and many are thoughtful, considered, even wise.

He paraphrases Phoenix arms manufacturer Frank DeSomma, who believes "*Private* gun ownership was what made America unique; the Second Amendment was what separated a citizen from a subject. The people who reviled DeSomma's products -- who placed sin taxes on them, discriminated against them in business dealings, and wanted them banned as 'assault rifles' -- were either massively ignorant or held a genuine disdain for the freedom such weapons represented."

For his own part, Baum is clear about what sort of measures should not be taken in the hopes of preventing or reducing the carnage from mass shootings.

After attending a weekend "3 gun" shooting event and following the progress of athletes Marcey and Jeremy Parker, Baum decides their chosen sport is "harmless, and I hoped nobody would mess with it by, say, mounting another stupid campaign to ban the AR-15."

As Baum says goodbye to the Parkers, he notes that none of the cars in the parking lot were festooned with gun-rights bumper stickers. "We're not all eat up in the head about gun rights," Jeremy tells him. "We just like to shoot."

Baum does meet his fair share of gun guys all eaten up in the head about gun rights -- and fueled with inchoate rage and paranoia.

He quotes someone going by the name SinCity2A at the website AR15.com who delivered to Baum a screed that mostly can't be reprinted in a family newspaper but included a vision of war between gun guys and blue-helmeted United Nations soldiers during which SinCity2A would "use my baseball bat to bash in your heads and warpaint my face with your blood and brain matter before I rack up a body count greater than Vlad the Impaler!"

Such rantings might seem merely cartoonish were it not for a recent Southern Poverty Law Center report, headlined "The 'Patriot' Movement Explodes," that charted a 755 percent growth in hate groups, from 149 in 2008 to 1,274 in 2012.

The Newtown massacre occurred after "Gun Guys" went to the publisher, leading Baum to do what he promised in his introduction he wouldn't do: discuss policy and make recommendations. In a postscript added to the book just before it went to press, Baum remains opposed to "stupid" assault rifle bans, but he does prescribe mandatory gun training and universal background checks.

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