

“HE DIDN’T THREATEN ANYBODY. HE OPINED.”

When Hal Turner was led away to jail for writing that three judges who had upheld the Chicago gun ban (which has since been overturned at SCOTUS) “deserved to be killed”—and provided maps to help his readers find the judges—his son insisted Turner didn’t threaten anybody, he opined.

But the third jury that ruled on charges that he threatened to assault and kill judges in retaliation for performing their official duties (the first two juries deadlocked) didn’t see it that way. After two hours of deliberation, they found him guilty.

As luck would have it, this country’s fearmongerers and bigots are rather busy sowing fear of Muslims right now, or there might have been a bigger response to this. But particularly given the delay through three trials, this verdict seems almost curious. Turner got sent to jail for behavior that is becoming increasingly acceptable of late. After all, more than one candidate for Congress has implicitly threatened violence as part of their campaign (though I wonder whether Sharon Angle and Ben Quayle are smart enough to draw maps, as Turner did). Yet much of the the press seems hesitant to call out that rhetoric as beyond the pale.

Hal Turner did step over the line (though I think it’s a close call legally). But just as big a problem is the media circus that allows someone like Turner to thrive, include the so-called objective media that apparently has a difficult time discerning between the violent rhetoric from right wing activists and policy arguments advanced through legislative means of lefty activists.