

As gunman is arraigned

Media whitewashes ultra-right in Arizona massacre

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As more information has emerged about the 22-year-old gunman who carried out a massacre Saturday outside a Tucson supermarket, the American media has sought to downplay the clear connection between his attempted assassination of a Democratic member of the House of Representatives and the politics of the ultra-right.

The explanation of the events of January 8 that now predominates is that Jared Lee Loughner opened fire on Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, severely wounding her and killing six other people, because he was a deranged lunatic, and that there was no political motivation involved.

Loughner is undoubtedly disturbed, but he was calm and responsive Monday afternoon at his arraignment in a Tucson federal court, where he was charged with murdering federal judge John Roll and congressional aide Gabe Zimmermann, and attempting to murder Giffords. He will also face state murder charges for the killing of four other victims of the shooting spree.

The mental state of the shooter in no way exhausts the analysis of Saturday's atrocity. It is merely the starting point, and a rather obvious one, since only a deranged individual would be capable of opening fire on a group of innocent people, including, among the dead, a nine-year-old girl and three elderly people in their 70s.

Loughner's actions raise questions about what medical treatment is available for the mentally ill—virtually none, even in a case like this where college classmates were fearful that he might turn to violence—and about the widespread availability of weapons like the Glock 19, whose sole purpose is mass, indiscriminate mayhem through the firing of dozens of rounds in a few seconds.

But the most important issue is what led Loughner to target a Democratic congresswoman. Understanding this necessarily requires an examination of the political circumstances that shaped the gunman's actions.

Here the central role was played by the ultra-right media campaign mounted by Fox News, talk show hosts like Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh, and the Tea Party wing of the Republican Party, including one Republican Senate candidate

who called for a "Second Amendment solution" to political issues—i.e., the use of firearms.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained yesterday (See "Arizona assassination spree tied to political right"), the political conceptions in Loughner's Internet postings are expressed in the vocabulary of the ultra-right media and the Tea Party, including his references to gold and silver backing for US currency, the predominance of the English language, and attacks on sections of the US Constitution, like the 14th Amendment, targeted by the ultra-right. He also reportedly remarked that a young woman who had an abortion was a "terrorist for killing the baby."

Moreover, both Fox News and the *New York Times* have reported, citing law enforcement sources, that Loughner may have links to a white supremacist publication called *American Renaissance*. Ongoing investigation may well develop more evidence of connections to the extreme right—a prospect that makes the "deranged individual" explanation even less credible.

Those media outlets that are the most directly implicated in creating the political climate for the January 8 attack are the most strident in self-justification. In their programs Monday, both Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh heaped scorn on efforts to link the attack to their right-wing hate campaigns.

The *Wall Street Journal*, in its editorial Monday headlined "Murder in Tucson," wrote: "Jared Lee Loughner is a mentally disturbed man who targeted Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and anyone near her in Tucson on Saturday because she was prominent and they were tragically accessible... Whatever confused political motives he expressed seem merely to be part of the maelstrom of his mental sickness."

After denouncing suggestions that there was a political motivation to the attack, the *Journal*, part of the Murdoch media empire along with Fox News, essentially demanded that President Obama provide the right wing with a political amnesty. He should "lift the level of public discourse by explaining the reality of Mr. Loughner's illness and calling out those on the right and left who want to blame the other side for

murder.”

A companion column by pundit Glenn Reynolds compared the charge of right-wing moral responsibility for the Tucson massacre to the anti-Semitic “blood libel” of the Nazis.

The *Washington Post* published an editorial warning against “the temptation ... to infuse the terrible attack with broader political meaning—to blame the actions of the alleged 22-year-old gunman, Jared Lee Loughner, on a vitriolic political culture laced with violent metaphors and ugly attacks on opponents.”

The *Post* published two columns by right-wing pundits, one headlined “Stop Blaming the Tea Party For the Arizona Tragedy,” the other declaring it “noxious to associate Saturday’s shooting with conservative campaign rhetoric, even that which is over the top.” The *Post*’s liberal columnist E.J. Dionne tut-tutted over violent rhetoric from the far right but joined in the consensus: “The point is not to ‘blame’ American conservatism for the actions of a possibly deranged man, especially since the views of Jared Lee Loughner seem so thoroughly confused.”

The *New York Times*, typically, tried to have it both ways, editorializing, “It is facile and mistaken to attribute this particular madman’s act directly to Republicans or Tea Party members. But it is legitimate to hold Republicans and particularly their most virulent supporters in the media responsible for the gale of anger that has produced the vast majority of these threats, setting the nation on edge.”

The last assertion is a deliberate cover-up of the real source of the “gale of anger” building in America, which is the economic collapse that has devastated the lives of tens of millions of people, and for which no faction of the capitalist political establishment, Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative, has any solution.

A long news analysis in the *Times* provides valuable details on the ideological connections between Loughner and several of the more bizarre factions of the far right, but it nonetheless declares that the assassin’s political motivation cannot be known with certainty: “Investigators will have to wrestle with the difficult question of whether Mr. Loughner’s parroting the views of extremist groups was somehow more a cause of the shootings or simply a symptom of a troubled life.”

This is, if anything, even more insidious than the flat denial of responsibility by the *Wall Street Journal*. The *Times* shows how close Loughner’s connections were to the ultra-right—“parroting the views of extremist groups”—and then asserts that no conclusion can be drawn.

Does anyone believe that if the attacker had been a Muslim who used the language of Al Qaeda in his Internet postings the American media would condemn as a “rush to judgment” the conclusion that this was an instance of “Islamic terrorism”?

As part of the push-back by the right wing, there have been public denunciations of the sheriff of Pima County, Clarence Dupnik, who heads the local investigation into the Tucson massacre. At his first press conference, Dupnik made a

forthright denunciation of “the vitriol and rhetoric that we hear day in and day out from the people in the radio business and some people in the TV business,” which he said contributed to the crime. Referring to a series of measures against immigrants, he said that the state of Arizona has “become the Mecca for prejudice and bigotry.”

Republican Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona denounced these comments in an appearance Sunday on the CBS interview program “Face the Nation.” “I didn’t really think that that had any part in a law enforcement briefing,” Kyl said. “It was speculation, and I don’t think we should rush to speculate.”

A Tucson talk-radio host, Jon Justice, called for Dupnik’s resignation, accusing him of him of “inciting through pure rhetoric.”

By Monday, much of the media, including liberal and Democratic Party spokesmen, had repudiated Dupnik’s comments. James Carville, a longtime Democratic campaign operative and media pundit, said on CNN, “It’s unfair to smear an entire state,” adding, “There’s no evidence that links the Tea Party to this.”

Carville’s remark typifies the political cowardice of the entire Democratic Party and liberal media establishment. They want to avoid any comprehensive exposure of a process that has been under way for more than three decades in American politics: the integration of the Republican Party with elements of an ultra-right and semi-fascist character, steeped in racism, anticommunism and hostility to democratic rights.

These right-wing elements exercise a degree of influence in American political life out of all proportion to their actual support in the population, because it serves the interests of the financial oligarchy to build them up as a means of shifting politics ever more to the right and creating the rudiments of a fascist movement to be thrown against the working class.

The Democratic Party is complicit in this process, even when the latest phase in this process—the media promotion of the Tea Party—culminates in direct violence against a Democratic Party officeholder.



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