

More evidence of right-wing links to Tucson attack

Patrick Martin
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While right-wing pundits and politicians continue to claim that it is illegitimate to hold them morally or politically responsible for the massacre carried out in Tucson, Arizona last Saturday, more evidence has emerged that the gunman, Jared Lee Loughner, drew inspiration from the political language and invective of the ultra-right.

The *Los Angeles Times* published a detailed summary of the ideological roots of the attack, in which Loughner killed six people, including a federal judge, and severely wounded Democratic Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. The analysis was headlined, “Loughner’s Ramblings Appear Rooted in Far Right.”

It noted that Loughner’s Internet postings included “a number of themes drawn from the right-wing patriot and militia movements.” Citing several groups that monitor the radical right, the *Times* noted, “several oft-repeated phrases and concepts—his fixation on grammar conspiracies, currency and the ‘second United States Constitution’—seem derived from concepts explored with regularity among elements of the far right.”

Loughner asserted, for example, that he would not “pay debt with a currency that’s not backed by gold and silver,” which dovetails with similar comments by anti-abortion gunman John C. Salvi III, who murdered two women in 1994 at an abortion clinic in Massachusetts.

The ultra-right spokesman most famously obsessed with gold and silver is Glenn Beck, the top-rated Fox News ranter. Beck regularly suggests that he or his co-thinkers are preparing to meet this or that supposed left-wing assault with armed force, declaring last fall, for instance, that if the federal government sought to compel him to have his children vaccinated against the flu, he would invite them to “meet Mr. Smith and Mr. Wesson.”

One of the experts interviewed by the *Times* is Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors racist and neo-Nazi groups. He wrote of

Loughner’s references to the US currency: “The idea that silver and gold are the only ‘constitutional’ money is widespread in the antigovernment ‘Patriot’ movement that produced so much violence in the 1990s. It’s linked to the core Patriot theory that the Federal Reserve is actually a private corporation run for the benefit of unnamed international bankers.”

The *Times* pointed out that Loughner’s claims of government mind control through the use of grammar were not simply bizarre and idiosyncratic raving—as right-wing pundits have claimed—but “were drawn from David Wynn Miller, a far-right activist in Milwaukee. Miller has argued to a small but avid following that the government launched a control program by writing citizens’ names in capital letters on their birth certificates, and that if colons and hyphens are added to people’s names in a certain way, they become a ‘prepositional phrase’ no longer subject to taxation.”

The *Times* also noted Loughner’s references to the “second Constitution,” right-wing jargon for the amendments to the Constitution adopted in the decades after the Civil War, and regarded, like the Civil War itself, as illegitimate. These include the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments, which abolished slavery and guaranteed voting rights and due process for the freed slaves, as well as guaranteeing citizenship for all those born in the US, including the children of immigrants, whatever their legal status. The post-1860 amendments also authorized the federal income tax, provided for direct election of US senators, and established the right of women to vote.

Loughner wrote at one point, “Reading the second United States Constitution, I can’t trust the government because of the ratifications.”

In its initial report on the massacre, the *World Socialist Web Site* drew attention to some of the same elements in Loughner’s online postings, including both US currency and the “second Constitution.” (See “Arizona

assassination spree tied to political right”)

Such political connections to the right wing are also indicated in a lengthy article in the *Wall Street Journal*, whose editorial page has been among the most strident in denouncing any suggestion that Loughner was influenced by right-wing politicians or media personalities.

Journal reporters obtained access to a large number of chats posted by Loughner on an online forum for a role-playing video game. They note in passing, “The postings exhibit fixations on grammar, the education system, government and currency, which some friends and acquaintances have described separately in the days since the attack.”

These “fixations” are precisely those detailed in the *Los Angeles Times* account and are of a uniformly right-wing character, although the *Journal* article gives no hint of that.

The article does however give a picture of the social conditions which contributed to Loughner’s explosion of violence: “The online-forum messages exhibit a growing frustration that, at 22 years of age, Mr. Loughner couldn’t land a minimum-wage job and was spurned by women. By May 15, he wrote, he hadn’t had a paycheck in six months. A month later, he wrote that he had submitted 65 applications, yet ‘no interview.’”

On May 14 of last year, Loughner began an online thread titled “How many applications... is a lot?” It contains a list of 21 retail outlets where he apparently applied for jobs but was rejected, including Crate & Barrel, Wendy’s and Domino’s Pizza. He also reported five “terminations,” including a pizza store, a Chinese fast food outlet, Red Robin, Quiznos and Eddie Bauer, and added that the list of firings “will be updated.”

Rather than rebut the charges factually, the typical right-wing response is to smear those in the “mainstream” media—a comparative handful of liberals—who continue to point out what is blindingly obvious: that Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, right-wing talk radio and the Tea Party wing of the Republican Party helped create the climate for the Tucson massacre.

Washington Post columnist and Fox News panelist Charles Krauthammer wrote Wednesday, “Rarely in American political discourse has there been a charge so reckless, so scurrilous and so unsupported by evidence.”

The previous day, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks made an equally bogus claim that the initial criticism of the right suppressed the evidence that Loughner “may be suffering from a mental illness like schizophrenia.” The claims that Loughner drew

inspiration from the political right, Brooks wrote, “were vicious charges made by people who claimed to be criticizing viciousness.”

Why mental illness should preclude Loughner having political ideas drawn from the ultra-right, Brooks did not bother to explain. Moreover, neither columnist addresses the obvious fact that Loughner chose to open fire on a Democratic congresswoman—one who only narrowly survived a challenge by a Tea Party candidate in the November midterm elections. The Republican candidate staged a campaign event in which he invited supporters to open fire with M-16 fully automatic rifles.

As one letter-writer to the *New York Times* observed: “Mr. Loughner was not, as Mr. Brooks contends, ‘locked in a world far removed from politics as we normally understand it.’ Mr. Loughner, even if mentally disturbed, chose his venue—a political gathering—and chose his victim, a Democratic congresswoman.”

Sarah Palin, the 2008 vice-presidential candidate of the Republican Party, released a video branding the claims that Loughner derived his political ideas from the ultra-right a “blood libel” against herself and her co-thinkers, language that prompted criticism from several Jewish organizations.

There is another element that underscores the political nature of the Tucson massacre. Not only did Loughner espouse views similar to those of the ultra-right, but in the hours immediately following the attempted assassination of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, many media outlets found their online blogs filled with comments celebrating his action, posted by other deranged right-wing individuals who recognized a co-thinker.

The *Los Angeles Times* referred to these comments in an editorial, but there has been virtually no media coverage of these postings, which expressed sympathy for the gunman’s targeting of a prominent Democrat.



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