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THEY SAID IT

Our Founders always wondered about how long it would last. The price of liberty is everlasting vigilance. You've got to be on your guard every minute or you will lose it. In most of history, societies have not been free. It's a very rare society that is free. The default condition of human societies is tyranny. Every society's inclination is toward tyranny, unless you resist it constantly.

Michael Novak, interview, September 17, 2005.

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THE TWIN TRAGEDIES OF TUCSON.

We were tempted, last week, to postpone the second part of our “fearless forecast,” and to write about the rage murder in Tucson. You see, there was no political story comparable in importance, and we thought it might be worthwhile to add our proverbial two cents to the one that had captured the full attention of the nation.

In retrospect, we are glad that we didn't. What could we have said at that moment that would have had any relevance or purpose or even, in truth, have been any different from that which the many exceptionally talented bloggers and new media journalists were saying? Nothing, we suspect. Which is why we waited.

Now that the attack has had time to become part of our national consciousness, we feel that there are important lessons to be learned, lessons that will help shape the political environment for at least the next two years if not longer. They are not, however, the lessons that most of the commentators, journalists, editorialists, and columnists would have us learn. Which is another reason why we're grateful we waited. So here goes.

As we interpret the events of the last ten days, we recognize there are really two “stories” here, one dealing with the murder, the murderer, and his victims; and the other dealing with the aftermath, particularly as it relates to politics and, possibly, policy.

The first story is, in a way, politically irrelevant, which is to say that it is not particularly germane subject matter for this newsletter. Now, please don't get us wrong. We understand fully that, *in human terms, this story is the only one that matters*. The grief. The pain. The senselessness of it all. That is real and poignant. But it has nothing to do with politics. And, more to the point, the political pales in significance. A deeply disturbed and

profoundly crazy young man surrendered to his rage and destroyed countless lives, including those of his own, undoubtedly shattered family members. What can one say about such things that doesn't trivialize the deep and incomprehensible pain and suffering? As the incomparable P.J. O'Rourke put it, "In the midst of life we are in death. There is, in this world, no making sense of such events." All we can say, all we can do, is to offer our sympathies and prayers to all of the victims.

That said, the second story, the story of the fallout, is the one that will, all but certainly, affect the broader public perception of this horrific event, the politics of it, if you will. This story is the one that, from the perspective of this little operation, matters most. And it is deeply depressing.

The first lesson that we believe can and should be learned from the last ten days is that it is dangerous, politically speaking, to judge politicians only in comparison to other politicians and not on their own merits, or lack thereof. To do so leads inevitably to disappointment and, more importantly, to potentially serious miscalculation. This is a lesson that should, at least in theory, have been learned countless times before, but which, unfortunately is rarely internalized.

Democrats, for example, chose John Kerry as their presidential nominee in 2004 because he seemed "electable" by comparison to the Republican incumbent. Kerry had been to war; Bush had not. Kerry had embraced his military service; Bush had not. Kerry had some claim to first-hand understanding of the military and its participation in unpopular wars; Bush did not. *Etc., etc., ad infinitum.* As it turned out, though, Kerry was not electable. Judged on his own merits, he was vain, snobbish, tin-eared, peevish, and manifestly unlikable. And he lost what should have been a winnable election.

Still, as was demonstrated by the Democrats' selection of Kerry, the American people can most often be counted upon to judge politicians by using artificial measures of comparison that often produce deceptive results, as became clear in the aftermath of the Tucson shootings.

Consider, if you will, the competing Democratic visages presented by Barack Obama and his Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. Most conservatives, all Republicans, and a great many independents and centrist Democrats have decided over the last two years that the Democratic primary voters got it wrong and should have selected Hillary as their nominee. The belief is that she would have been far better for the country and for the Democratic Party. We ourselves have been guilty of indulging in such fantasies, noting how much more deftly and centrist-ly the Clintons seemed to handle issues that have caused trouble for Obama.

All of this is, as we learned again this past week, pure rubbish. Hillary Clinton is many things, including a more pragmatic politician than Obama, but she is still Hillary Clinton, which is to say that she, like her husband, is still a self-serving, self-absorbed political charlatan whose principal concern in politics is how events can enrich, strengthen, or empower her. She is, in short, exactly as we remember her, not as she appears in comparison to Obama.

You see, last week, *while officially engaged in her duties as Secretary of State*, Mrs. Clinton told a foreign audience that the Tucson murderer, Jared Lee Loughner, was a political "extremist," engaged in acts of terrorism no different than that of the 9/11 hijackers. As *The Telegraph* of London reported:

In a television broadcast filmed before students in Abu Dhabi, Mrs Clinton was asked why the 9/11 terror attacks, the work of a handful of men, had been allowed to colour American views of a whole people.

She replied that America was "proud" of its many Muslim citizens and public servants, and said that the media exaggerated the voices of those who presented hostile views of the Muslim and Arab worlds.

She then raised the shooting at the weekend of the Arizona Democratic congresswoman, Gabrielle Giffords. “We have extremists in our country,” she said. “A wonderful and incredibly brave young woman congress member was just shot by extremists in our country.

“We have the same kinds of problems, so rather than standing off of each other we should work to try and prevent the extremists wherever they are from being able to commit violence.”

Extremist. Not lunatic. Not lone, deranged nut job. But “extremist.” Just to make sure no one had missed her point, Hillary took a second shot at it a day later, telling CNN with regard to Loughner:

When you cross the line from expressing opinions . . . [to] violent action, that is a hallmark of extremism – whether it comes from the right, the left, from al Qaeda, from anarchists, whoever it is.

Al Qaeda. Extremism. Anarchists. Loughner.

We’d be tempted to dismiss her as stupid, as well meaning but ill informed. But we know from experience that she is none of those things, particularly “well meaning.” Her husband used the Oklahoma City bombing to his political advantage 16 years ago. And she saw no reason why she couldn’t or shouldn’t do the same. “Dreadful” and “shameful” seem like such feeble adjectives at a moment like this.

Contrast Hillary’s reaction with that of the man whom most conservatives claim to loathe even more, the President of the United States, Barack Obama. Obama gave a very nice speech the other night, one in which he specifically repudiated Hillary’s judgment (and that of the mainstream press) that political extremism was, in any way, the cause of Loughner’s crimes, and one which was praised for its magnanimity by liberals and conservatives alike.

We have no illusions about Obama and believe, moreover, that he said what he said for less than altruistic reasons. But still, he held his tongue and managed to appear presidential and genuinely decent at a moment when the country needed both. The very idea that Hillary would be equally capable is, particularly in light of her own statements last week, laughable.

Maybe Hillary would be better on most or even all of the issues about which conservatives care. But that’s hard to say. It is easy to forget, given that Bill ended up a rather conservative-sounding centrist, that such an outcome was not because he suddenly saw the light, but because the American public stopped him from doing what he would like to have done, which, by the way, included Hillary-care.

People – like Bill and Hillary Clinton – who believe in nothing other than their own destiny to accumulate power, are dangerous, and this doesn’t change simply because they can appear less dangerous than someone else, say Barack Obama.

Lesson number two from the aftermath of the Tucson massacre is that there is indeed an establishment presence in this country that sees its historical power slipping away and is desperate to hold on to that power. But this desperate and frightened establishment presence is not the one about which we have been told.

The conventional wisdom – or perhaps more accurately the “mainstream narrative” – has it that white Americans, who make up roughly half of the population, are unhappy about the prospect of losing their majority status and are therefore lashing out at and attempting to intimidate the other half of the country. This, according to popular narratives, is the real reason the Tea Party types are upset with Obama. It’s why they “hate” him and obsess about his “exotic” heritage. It is also the reason why conservatives oppose open borders, seek to build fences, and choose to deny legitimacy to those immigrants who are already here, living, working, and going to school in the United States. White Americans, we are told – mostly by other, but somehow more enlightened white

Americans – are racists and, worse yet, they are scared racists, terrified of losing their privileged position in society. And all of this, in turn, is the source of the “violent rhetoric” and “climate of hate” that produced Jared Loughner and the Tucson massacre.

This is pure garbage. Certainly race remains a contentious issue in this country, but mostly it is the obsession of the Left, not the Right. Moreover, there are legitimate reasons for opposing Obama’s agenda and for wanting the federal government to make a more serious effort to enforce the nation’s immigration laws that have nothing whatsoever to do with race. The Right makes these arguments constantly, vociferously, and vividly all of the time. But none of that appears to matter much to those who have already determined what the “narrative” is and what it should remain.

Now, all of this is not to say that there is no validity to the narrative. There is. Indeed, it is, in many ways, quite accurate. It’s just that the mainstream version has all of players wrong.

If the events of the last ten days have confirmed anything, it is that the mainstream media is absolutely terrified about losing its privileged, historical position as the agenda-setter in American social and political circles. Once upon a time, there was the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the networks that cribbed from both. Now there is Fox News, Matt Drudge, Instapundit, Rush Limbaugh, Glen Beck and countless other widely read and widely respected (by news consumers, anyways) alternative sources of information. And the *Times*, in particular, hates it.

As it turns out, the mainstream narrative about white racism is almost entirely a fabrication of the media establishment, a tall tale designed to conceal the real loss of power and the real loss of privilege by attempting to delegitimize and to marginalize those who dissent from the establishment line and thereby comprise a threat.

In the aftermath of the shooting in Tucson, the *Times*, in particular, behaved atrociously, allowing its columnists, reporters, and news analysts to engage in

the most dishonest and prejudiced speculation about the shooter, his motivations, and the influence of the much-discussed and oft-maligned “climate of hate” – all without a single shred of evidence and even, in some cases, in contravention of what evidence there was. Perhaps the most telling and most vile passage written in the days after the shooting was written by the *Times* editorial board itself: “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.”

Republicans are evil. They produce threats. And, more to the point, their “virulent supporters in the media” are equally evil.

Talk about scared and doleful. Could a news organization possibly be more pathetic? Could one make more obvious its contempt for and fear of its rivals? Again, to borrow from the inestimable P.J. O’Rourke:

A reaction so disproportionate and immaterial to a news story by a news organization is indicative of trouble in the body politic—trouble almost as severe as that which the *Times* claims the Giffords shooting indicates. I worry that in the tremors and hysteria of the *Times* we’re seeing the sad end of liberalism . . .

Liberalism, as personified by the *New York Times*, became a dotty old aunt sometime during the Johnson administration. She’s provincial, eccentric, and holds dull, peculiar views about the world. Still, she has our fond regard, and we visit her regularly in her nursing home otherwise known as Arts and Leisure and the Book Review. Or we did until Sunday, January 9, when she began spouting obscenities and exposing herself.

We'd amend O'Rourke only to suggest that this is the "sad end of the liberal media," and not of liberalism itself. The *Times* and its vaunted Timesmen are a sad relic, former powerbrokers who refuse to loose their grip on the pretensions of power and who will therefore strike out – wildly, shamelessly, dishonestly – at anyone capable of heaping more dirt on their collective grave. And in this they are, as always, merely representative of the mainstream media in general. The *Times* is the leader. It always has been. And it is, it would seem, even willing to lead its contemporaries into the gutter. No shock there. But now there is no denying it. The mask, as it were, has been stripped away, and the foul, scared beast that lies beneath has been fully exposed.

Be aware, gentle reader. This beast is, obviously, not going down without a fight, which is to say that this war against the truth and against those who deny the legacy media its "birthright" to decide what represents the truth has only just begun. And it is not going to end anytime soon.

The third lesson to be drawn from Tucson is that the effects of all-powerful and all-intrusive government are not merely symbolic or theoretical. They are real. And they cause real and serious complications in society and among those who ostensibly serve as leaders of society. When "the personal is political" then everything is political, even that which isn't.

For years now, we and a handful of others have insisted that the problem with big government isn't the cost of it, or the taxes, or the deficits, or anything else related to or stemming from the fiscal imbalances created by such a massive entity. The problem with big government, we insisted and continue to insist, is big government.

Big government enervates the human spirit. It makes it dependent. It convinces erstwhile freeborn men and women that good things – all good things – come from government. It perverts the social contract and inverts the relationship between the governed and their government.

Eight years ago, Europe suffered a heat wave (which like this year's snow storms was undoubtedly caused by global warming) and in some countries a great many elderly men and women died. We noted then that this was a direct consequence of big government:

As it turns out, the heat wave that gripped France came at an exceptionally inconvenient time for the French. July and August are when much of France shuts down and goes on vacation. And while on vacation, too many French, by their own admission and that of their political leaders, simply couldn't be bothered to worry a whole lot about their elderly relatives literally roasting to death back home.

According to an August 28 article in *The International Herald Tribune*, the debate in France and Italy, where an additional thousand or so people died from the heat, "broadened to a general discussion on the dissolution of the traditionally tight-knit family structure." "Many older people died, it is said," the *IHT* noted, "because they had been abandoned by families going on vacation."

Sadly, that's not even the worst of it. Literally hundreds of corpses were stored throughout Paris in both real and makeshift refrigerated morgues for weeks because the same relatives who couldn't be bothered to interrupt their vacations to assure their alleged "loved ones" were alive, also couldn't be bothered to interrupt their vacations to claim the old gal after she'd already died.

According to *The New York Times*, Bernard Mazeyrie, a managing director of General Funeral Services, confirmed that many relatives simply didn't want their holiday weekends screwed up by an old relative who'd had the discourtesy to

die inopportuno. *The Times* reported that Mazeyrie told them “Some [of the notified families] . . . informed of the death of relatives, postponed funerals, not to interrupt the August 15 holiday weekend, and left the bodies in the refrigerated hall.” . . .

We continued, quoting Mark Steyn, who summed it all up thusly:

In Paris this spring, a government official explained to me how Europeans had created a more civilized society than America - socialised healthcare, shorter work weeks, more holidays. We’ve just seen where that leads: gran’ma turned away from the hospital to die in an airless apartment because junior’s *sur la plage*. M. Chirac’s somewhat tetchy suggestion that his people should rethink their attitude to the elderly was well taken. But Big Government inevitably diminishes its citizens’ capacity to take responsibility, to the point where even your dead mum is just one more inconvenience the state should do something about.

We revisited this argument last spring, just as the Democrats were about to pass their health care reform bill, noting that the purpose of the bill was not to provide health insurance, but to change forever the relationship between the individual and the state, to force the individual to think of the state as the provider of all rights, rather than merely the guarantor of those rights as the Founders (and Aquinas, and Locke, and Tocqueville, and Burke, etc. etc.) believed. The ultimate end of the health care legislation was to solidify the belief, already fairly solidly established, that government is the principal actor in all human interactions.

Related to this belief that government plays the central role in all human action is the belief introduced by the 1960s feminists and widely adopted by the broader

political left thereafter that the “personal is political,” which is to say that every possible human concern is also a political concern and that every aspect of one’s life can and should be guided by political principles. These two related and indissoluble obsessions – with government and with politics – have together created a mindset among a great many on the left that presumes that everything, everywhere is related to, derived from, and affected by political considerations.

Given all of this, is anyone even remotely surprised that the very same people who pushed the health care reform, who favor government solutions to any and all problems, who believe that government can and should be all things to all people, and who think that the personal should be political, also immediately and irreversibly insisted that the murders committed by Jared Loughner were the direct result of his political views and, when those views turned out not to be what the pundits hoped, the direct result of the “political climate?” Is it even mildly surprising that these political/government obsessives simply assumed that Loughner was one of them, that *everyone* is one of them, and thinks about the world solely in terms of politics and government?

The initial presumption that Loughner attacked Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords for a political reason made a certain amount of sense. After all, she is a politician. But even this seemingly innocuous and seemingly reasonable presumption betrayed an ignorance of political assassinations and an unwarranted obsession with government and politics.

The fact of the matter – as noted by Robert Fein, a former Secret Service psychologist and co-author of that agency’s best known and most respected study on the phenomenon of political assassinations – is that the notion that assassinations have anything to do with the politics of either the murderer or his victim is utterly and completely false. As a general rule, assassins pick political targets for personal reasons and to generate as much publicity for themselves as possible. They choose their targets, in other words, based on notoriety not policy.

What this means, then, is that the narrative that was created by the mainstream media and the left-leaning commentariat in the immediate aftermath of the of the murders in Tucson was not only false but was derived from the motives, obsessions, preoccupations, and fantasies of the narrative's creators, having almost nothing to do with the actual events on the ground in Tucson. As we understand Loughner and his motivations today (and this is, of course, subject to change), the politics of hate, the politics of immigration, the politics of the Tea Party, politics of *any sort* played no role whatsoever. Only in the fevered and politically obsessed imaginations of the mainstream press did government and its role in Americans' lives have any relevance.

This is a truism, of course. But when one sees government as the source of all things, one can't help but see government as the source of all things – even things as perverse and demented as mass murder. As it turns out, an obsession with government distorts not only one's expectations for said government's behavior, but also one's perception of otherwise apolitical phenomena. And this, in turn, foments a highly inaccurate, caricature-like interpretation of events. The mainstream media was utterly embarrassed in its coverage of the shooting in Tucson, not just in its rush to judgment, but also by the limitations placed on its own cognition by its collective obsession with government and politics.

The final lesson to be drawn from the response to the Tucson shooting is that the effects of the post-modern moral code, like the effects of the obsession with big government, are real and tangible and can dramatically impact the perception and interpretation of events, which in turn, can dramatically impact the effectiveness of an erstwhile free press, – rightly seen by the Founders as a bulwark against tyranny.

As we have noted countless times, there is, in this country, an ongoing clash between supporters of competing moral systems, one which hinges on the notion that “truth” is an absolute and eternal concept, and the other which proposes that truth is a mere human construct propagated by those possessing power and directed toward the consolidation of

that power. In essence, this is a clash between the traditional Judeo-Christian moral code and the post-modern moral code.

What we saw in the aftermath of the Tucson was an assertion by the post-modern crowd that their perception of the incident was important, even vital, to the well being of the Obama presidency and, by extension, the nation, and that the mere “facts” would do nothing to dissuade them from promoting that perception.

As we noted above, nearly everything that the mainstream media – and the *New York Times* in particular – told us about the shooting, the shooter, and his motives proved, rather quickly, to be false. He was not a conservative. He was not motivated by Sarah Palin, by the health care debate, or by any stupid map with cross hairs on it. He was not politically active. He was not an anti-government, anti-immigrant activist. He was, as it turns out, none of the above. He was just a sick kid with a personal grudge, a gun, and a desire to make himself famous.

But none of that appears to matter to the denizens of the fever swamps on the political left. To them, the fact that their narrative is wrong is mere happenstance. It could be right, in theory, so it doesn't matter that it's wrong. As Democratic Congressman Brad Sherman of California declared, “Whether [political rhetoric] caused what happened in Tucson or not, it'll cause the next tragedy.”

That this is absurd doesn't seem to bother any of these people. Heck, it doesn't even seem to have occurred to them. They know what they know and it doesn't really matter one whit to them whether or not the facts support what they know. Facts, you see, are irrelevant.

This is, of course, not the first time we have seen a display such as this. Recall that back during the 2004 presidential election, CBS's Dan Rather went on air with documents purporting to show that President George W. Bush committed some indiscretion or another while serving as a member of the Texas

Air National Guard during the Vietnam War. The documents turned out to be forgeries, and bad forgeries at that, typed in the default typeface for Microsoft Word (Times New Roman), which didn't exist when the documents were purportedly written.

Despite all of this, Rather, his producer, and the political left in general stood by the story, insisting that the fact that the documents were forgeries didn't mean that they couldn't have detailed real events. The claims made by Rather et al. were, in the parlance of the day, "false but accurate."

And so, it would seem, are the charges about conservatism causing mass murder in Tucson. Technically the charges aren't true, at least not this time. But so what? They could be.

Any normal person would see this as crazy. But these are not, it should be obvious by now, normal people we're dealing with. They are journalists and politicians – leftist journalists and politicians, to be specific – which is to say that they are adherents of the post-modern moral code that dictates that truth is a mere human construct.

In 1823, Thomas Jefferson declared that:

The only security of all is in a free press. The force of public opinion cannot be resisted when permitted freely to be expressed. The agitation it produces must be submitted to. It is necessary, to keep the waters pure.

But what happens to the "security of all" if that free press is so enfeebled, not by government restriction or manipulation, but by its own pathologies and neuroses? What happens to the "force of public opinion" if the free press decides that public opinion, like truth, independence, and freedom from government interference are mere fetishes of the great unwashed?

We don't know exactly, but we're not particularly keen to find out.

Fortunately, we don't think we'll have to find out. The new media and the citizen media have proven time and again that they are up to the challenge and capable of embarrassing the legacy media that chooses to put it political obsession above the truth and above the needs of its readers. It is not, as it turns out, 1995 anymore. Barack Obama could not have turned the massacre in Tucson into his own version of Clinton's Oklahoma City, even if he had wanted to. There is too much information available in too many places to allow that to happen today.

Unfortunately, that doesn't mean that the politicians and journalists who long to see Clinton's Oklahoma City revisited won't continue trying. They are under siege, and they know it. And they will try again the next time an opportunity presents itself.

And that, perhaps, is the greatest lesson of all, i.e., there are people in this country, people with a great deal of power and influence, who are absolutely convinced of their own righteousness and who will stop at nothing – be it defaming their own countrymen to foreign audiences, striking out desperately at rivals, injecting politics into every aspect of human affairs, or denying the very existence of truth – to see their vision for the country implemented, the will of the people be damned.

As we noted in our introduction, there are two stories here. The first is simple, but tragic. Such viciousness as took place in Tucson is, sadly, inevitable in a free society populated by fragile and imperfect men and women. The second is a little more complicated. And it involves the attempt by entrenched powers to maintain or even expand that power through what amounts to deception. The second of these, perhaps surprisingly, is the most dangerous. But it also the one that can be thwarted through eternal vigilance.

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