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January 17, 2011

By E-Mail
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Voice of the People
P.O. Box 610
Halifax, N.S. B3J 2T2

Dear Sir/Madam:

Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to the victims and their families in the recent Tucson shootings. At the same time, we also want to express our sincere disappointment with Bogdan Kipling's column on January 13 about this terrible event. On the one hand, he accuses the Washington press corps of jumping to conclusions without checking the facts about what led to this horrible tragedy.

But then, on the other hand, he engages in the same practice by opening speculating about the background and mental health of the alleged killer. Worse still, he refers to this person using the words "nut", "nutters" and "lunacy". He also outlines a very narrow view of how mental illness can be detected by such signs as "wiggly lines" and "glaring incoherence".

We find these terms and his approach to be offensive and unwarranted. We had thought that professional journalists such as Mr. Kipling would have long abandoned such demeaning language and stereotypes. Has he never thought about how the stereotypes used by him affects anyone living with mental illness?

We would urge Mr. Kipling and all other journalists to take some time to get the real facts about mental illness and mental health before making such ill-founded and discriminatory statements. As stated by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, seven million Canadians will need help for mental health problems this year alone and many will not get it due to the stigma attached to the illness.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gail Gardiner and Joan Jessome". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed names.

Gail Gardiner and Joan Jessome
Co-Chairpersons
Mental Health Coalition of Nova Scotia

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Journalists breaking own rules in covering Tucson tragedy

By BOGDAN KIPLING
Thu, Jan 13 - 4:54 AM



Like lemmings plunging over a Norwegian cliff, much of the Washington press corps blindly committed ethical collapse by rushing to blame the tragedy in Tucson on the "climate of hate" fostered by right-wing Republicans. They pinned this misleading tag of political responsibility pretty much en masse, and within minutes of the shooting of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords. The newly re-elected Arizona Democrat was grievously wounded and six people were killed.



Sarah Palin, shown in a Nov. 30 file photo, has posted a video on her Facebook page condemning those who blame political rhetoric for the Arizona shooting. (Brian E. Chilson / AP)

The slaughter occurred Saturday in a Safeway parking lot, where the Congresswoman was holding her customary "meet your representative" mini-rally.

As is their wretched custom, the media rushed to immediate judgment even though, at the time, nothing was known about the assailant beyond his name, Jared Lee Loughner. There was no information about his background, let alone his politics.

But ignorance of fact is no barrier to the media's best. Some of them even reported that Mr. Loughner was a disgruntled Afghan war veteran — a factoid plucked from the compression chamber of the 24 / 7 news cycle.

Predictably, later fact-checking showed U.S. army recruiters rejected the 22-year-old Mr. Loughner when he tried to enlist months before, seemingly because he was assessed as a nut.

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Journalists are pretty good at spotting nutters. They receive enough letters and messages crawling with wiggly lines, underscored or capitalized words, and glaring incoherence to qualify as shrinks. That is why linking lunacy to political climate is hardly ever an accident, but an act of blatant partisanship.

Checking out Jared Lee Loughner's YouTube and MyFace websites would have shown a mentally troubled individual.

Mr. Loughner's warning signs were there, on the web, blazing as incoherent anti-establishment diatribes and reference to the two major influences of his brightened life: the Communist Manifesto and Mein Kampf, Hitler's repugnant proclamation of Aryan superiority and deranged nationalism.

But checking out information before pontificating on camera, on microphone or in print has gone the way of the dodo. That is a pity. Were the dodo still around, hacks would have learned quickly about the suspect's college classmates. One of them described Jared Lee Loughner as a "left-wing pothead" and another said he frequently talked about being "into mind control."

But, with the exception of Fox, non-stop cable TV and radio drowned in conjured political

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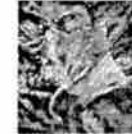
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- Healthy living last in shuffle
By MARILLA STEPHENSON
- Journalists breaking own rules in covering Tucson tragedy
By BOGDAN KIPLING
- Party-switchers are no panacea
By MARILLA STEPHENSON
- Protesting demonization with, um, demonization
By PAUL SCHNEIDERREIT
- Tories note: It's payback time for Casey
By MARILLA STEPHENSON
- There's good and bad on both sides of war
By SCOTT TAYLOR On Target
- Border troubles? Good luck trying to appeal
By DAN LEGER
- Steele: No more gambling predictions
By DAVID JACKSON Provincial Reporter | The Howe Room
- Anything that costs \$2.5m stays
By DOMINIK DIAMOND
- Storm-day debate could be ended by common sense
By MARILLA STEPHENSON

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2. [RCMP: Slow down around emergency vehicles](#) (61 votes)
3. [Homeless man charged in Toronto officer's death](#) (54 votes)
4. [Brewster's knows how to cook ribs](#) (28 votes)
5. [Snow fraileicker shot with pellet gun](#) (23 votes)

motives, and The New York Times elevated the spin to new heights. The paper of record, the gold standard of American journalism for nearly a century, couldn't resist a headline that screamed "Bloodshed Puts New Focus on Vitriol in Politics."

Matt Bai, one of the paper's correspondents, linked Tucson and the Tea Party in a heartbeat. The Tea-ers, as one journalist I know calls the movement's followers, have created an "imagery of armed revolution," Mr. Bai said, and accused the Tea movement's ur-mother, Sarah Palin, of using words like "tyranny" when talking about President Barack Obama and Democrats.

Horrors, Americans must neuter every direct word to return to political civility in politics. That is funny: The media mavens do not comprehend that there can be no return to what never was. American political speech was always rough when it was not crude or brutal.

Paul Krugman, the Times' premier columnist, also wasted not a breath before charging Sarah Palin, the Tea Party phenomenon, gun lovers, and mean-spirited Republicans of creating "the climate of hate" as birthing room of the Tucson massacre.

Diane Rehm, a syndicated talk show host on National Public Radio, clucked her way through an hour-long segment that essentially laid the lion's share of the blame on angry Republicans who had the temerity to criticize ObamaCare and the relentless march of illegal immigrants.

It borders on the despicable that the many liberal writers who fancy themselves as the elite corps of Washington journalism could break so many rules of journalism in reporting and commenting on the crime, the more effectively to tar their ideological opponents.

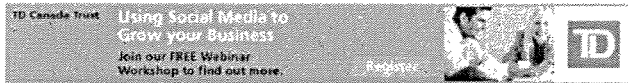
The only mitigating factor here is that, at least in America, refusing to chalk up crime to criminals and insanity to the crazy is decades old.

Notwithstanding, the media's indecent performance here begs this question: Should the usual suspects be sent to the University of Alaska campus at Point Barrow for a refresher course in how to practise their craft?

(bkipling@herald.ca)

Bogdan Kipling is a Canadian journalist in Washington.

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7. [Storm subsides; flurries, showers expected today](#) (18 votes)
8. [Teens kept in stitches](#) (18 votes)
9. [Two Valley men in custody facing assault, weapons charges](#) (16 votes)
10. [Hello, my name is Sue](#) (15 votes)



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