

Here We Go Again ...

☒ This was the headline in a column about the Arizona shootings in the Sunday Guardian out of London.

“In the US, where hate rules at the ballot box, this tragedy has been coming for a long time”

And then the sub-headline:

“The shooting of Gabrielle Giffords may lead to the temporary hibernation of rightwing rage, but it is encoded in conservative DNA”

Yes, the Guardian is a far left piece of work so we shouldn't be surprised by the shallowness or visceral hatred of conservatives by one of its pundits. But the same message, in slightly less outrageous form, is the topic of much conversation in the American media too.

There is grave concern about the “vitriol” and “anger” in American politics and commentary. It was all over the Sunday talk shows and on page one of the New York Times under the headline “Bloodshed Puts New Focus on Vitriol in Politics.”

Here we go again.

After Timothy McVeigh blew up the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, liberals in the media played connect the dots back to conservative talk radio.

Dan Rather said, “Even after Oklahoma City, you can turn on your radio in any city and still dial up hate talk; extremist, racist, and violent from the hosts and those who call in.”

Time magazine senior writer Richard Lacayo put it this way: “In a nation that has entertained and appalled itself for years with hot talk on radio and the campaign trail, the inflamed rhetoric of the '90s is suddenly an unindicted co-

conspirator in the blast.”

Carl Rowan, the late columnist, was quoted in a Washington Post story saying that, “Unless Gingrich and Dole and the Republicans say ‘Am I inflaming a bunch of nuts?’ you know we’re going to have some more events. I am absolutely certain the harsher rhetoric of the Gringriches and the Doles ... creates a climate of violence in America.”

And David Broder wrote in the Washington Post that, “The bombing shows how dangerous it really is to inflame twisted minds with statements that suggest political opponents are enemies. For two years, Rush Limbaugh described this nation as ‘America held hostage’ to the policies of the liberal Democrats, as if the duly elected president and Congress were equivalent to the regime in Tehran. I think there will be less tolerance and fewer cheers for that kind of rhetoric.”

As that great American philosopher Yogi Berra might say: “This is déjà vu all over again.”

Now, we hear not about Gingrich and Dole, but about Sarah Palin and those bullseyes she put on a map depicting congressional districts that were in her crosshairs during the mid-term election. Frankly, I think Ms. Palin pulled a real dumb move with those bullseyes. But unless we find out that the shooter was influenced by those icons – or saw them, or even knew they existed – then why drag Sarah Palin into this?

There’s also been a lot of talk about supposedly extreme and dangerous rhetoric in other conservative circles. Glenn Beck, Bill O’Reilly and Rush Limbaugh came in for special treatment by Keith Olbermann on MSNBC. What else is new? But again, unless it turns out that their words influenced the gunman, then why bring it up now?

Paul Krugman, the left-wing New York Times columnist, went on line to say that “Violent acts are what happen when you create a climate of hate. And it’s long past time for the GOP’s

leaders to take a stand against the hate mongers," two of whom he mentioned by name: Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh. This without a scintilla of proof that the shooter was influenced by either of them.

And then there's Sheriff Clarence Dupnik, the top Arizona law enforcement officer investigating the shooting. He too believes there's too much hate and vitriol in the air – on radio and television – and, as he put it, "words have consequences." But when Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly asked the sheriff if there was anything he had discovered that suggested the gunman was "listening to radio or watching television and was in any way inspired by what he heard or saw," the sheriff said he had no such evidence.

Who needs evidence when your mind is already made up, when you just know those *hate-mongering conservatives* are responsible, directly or otherwise, for the massacre in Tucson.

The sad fact is that some people are just plain nuts. They might go off after seeing a red balloon or Mickey Mouse or reading a recipe on a box of Betty Crocker cake mix. That's why we say they're unstable and unhinged. We don't know as of this writing what motivated the gunman in Arizona. And until we do, journalists – even opinion journalists – should stop playing connect the dots.

It's interesting, and not in a good way, that the same liberals who are so concerned about supposedly hateful conservative speech polluting our national conversation never seemed especially bothered by all the talk about President Bush being a "war criminal" and a "Nazi."

Nor were they especially outraged over the movie "Death of a President" which was about the assassination – not of some fictional generic president – but of President George W. Bush specifically.

And were my sensitive liberal friends thrown into a tizzy when

in June of 2008, during the presidential campaign, candidate Barack Obama said, "If they [Republicans] bring a knife to the fight, we bring a gun"?

No! Somehow all of this flew beneath their normally fine-tuned radar.

The terrible tragedy in Arizona should not be one more tiresome liberal vs. conservative debate. But that's what some liberals have turned it into. Without a shred of evidence that the gunman was influenced by Palin, Beck, O'Reilly, Limbaugh or the tea partiers, the opportunists on the Left are fretting about the vitriol in our national conversation allegedly brought on by these supposed right-wing villains. But what the conservative-bashers are really doing is simply taking a page out of the Rahm Emanuel playbook. They're not going to let this crisis, or any other, go to waste.

