

1-10-2011

The Giffords Shooting: Who's the Fall Guy?

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>



Part of the American Politics Commons, Continental Philosophy Commons, Defense and Security Studies Commons, Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons, International Relations Commons, Other Political Science Commons, Other Psychology Commons, Peace and Conflict Studies Commons, and the Terrorism Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (2011) "The Giffords Shooting: Who's the Fall Guy?," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 17 : Iss. 13 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol17/iss13/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: The Giffords Shooting: Who's the Fall Guy?

Author: Editor

Volume: 17

Issue: 13

Date: 2011-01-10

Keywords: Assassination, Narrative

Abstract: The author explores the concept of 'the fall guy' from a political philosophical perspective.

A fall guy can be someone who intentionally engages in dangerous behavior so others don't have to. This fall guy—AKA a stuntman or woman—may do it for money, thrills, a need to overcompensate for feelings of inferiority or validate a sense of superiority, even for masochistic pleasure.

Then there's the fall guy who is an intentional or unintentional scapegoat for the misbehavior of others. This fall guy—at times un homme, une femme de paille—may or may not go along with taking the rap for all the motives mentioned above and others as well.

There also are fall guys behind the scenes who exploit both sorts of fall guys above for the same motives. These fall guys are fall guys in name only in that they own the other fall guys.

Why are there fall guys? Informed speculation from philosophy and the social and behavioral sciences suggest that all types of fall guys serve to increase human perceptions of stability, order, and predictability in the world and are vital components of human nature.

With the Giffords shooting, we see all of this in play as fall guys contest for which fall guy narrative will be privileged (swallowed) by general publics serving as both participants and audience. The play becomes a show like an American Gladiator of the mind within a global village.

So let's look at some of the fall guy narratives related to the Giffords shooting.

There's Jared Lee Loughner as fall guy. The narrative runs as follows. He's the shooter and responsible solely because he shot. Or he's responsible via the intermediary phenomenon of some sort of emotional or mental disorder or unfortunate personality dynamic matrix. Case closed.

Or Loughner is part of a conspiracy of like-minded souls still to be discovered. These like-minded souls may be personal acquaintances, never-met virtual contacts, or imagined figures whose reality may wax and wane. Like Gogol's Dead Souls, members of the conspiracy may even be no longer with us but must still function as commodities with a surplus value of influence, identification, introjection, and emulation.

Or Loughner is message in a bottle. A chicken coming home to roost. A cipher. At the mercy of others. These others constitute talking heads of the mass media and their graphics and graphical language of violence. But not just of violence. The talking heads may talk about anything. The issues du jour help craft the message, launch the chicken, and form the cipher as they interact with one human mind at a time as well as mind collectivities. In this, Loughner's own diatribe about mind control and brainwashing via grammar controlled by the government may not be far off the mark.

Far from constructs like the ideal speech situation in the public sphere of philosopher Jürgen Habermas, far from the medium is the message of literary critic and media studies professor Marshall McLuhan, a

war is going on. But what kind of war? In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche speculates on and advocates for "...War (but without gunpowder!) between different thoughts and their armies..." as the ideal human future. According to Nietzsche, the war of bullets and physical weaponry would often just be a side show and then disappear altogether in the shadow of the war of fall guy narratives. It's almost as if Nietzsche--so enamored by ancient Greece--was merging the best of Homer's warriors with the warrior Sophists in the time of Socrates. But with the transition still ongoing in our own time, lie the fallen--Adam and Eve ordered out of Eden, Prometheus and Sisyphus doomed to everlasting anguish, Satan and his minions hurled from Heaven--the fall guys, the dead.

References: Gogol, N. (1997). *Dead souls*. (R. Pevear & L. Volokhonsky, Trans.). NY: Vintage.
Habermas, J. (1990). *Discourse ethics: Notes on a program of philosophical justification. Moral consciousness and communicative action*. (C. Lenhart & S. Weber Nicholson, Trans.). Cambridge: MIT Press;
McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. NY: McGraw Hill;
Meloy, J. R., Sheridan, L., & Hoffmann, J. (Eds.), (2008). *Stalking, threatening, and attacking public figures: A psychological and behavioral analysis*. NY: Oxford University Press.
Nietzsche, F. (1954). *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). NY: Viking.