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Kinsley Is Half-Right

Michael Sean Winters | Jan. 11, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

All political writers tremble to think they belong in the same category as Michael Kinsley. So smart, such elegant writing, so willing and able to break past the trench warfare of so much political argument and find a point of reason beyond the trenches. But, on the Tucson massacre fall-out [1], I think he is only half-right. Kinsley is correct to say that the extreme right has a greater hold on thhe extreme left, that while it is correct to say that NPR or the New York Times leans left, they do not lean left the way Fox leans right. Indeed, while I recognize that someone like Rachel Maddow has ideological blinders that shade both what she chooses to discuss and how she chooses to discuss it, she does not do what Fox does, which is to just make stuff up. Remember the billions of dollars and dozens of Navy ships it was going to cost for Obama to go to India?

It is also the case that currently, and for a variety of reasons, the political Right is more susceptible to violent rhetoric and metaphors. We do not know what motivated the killer in Tucson. The Kennedys were surprised to discover that, in Dallas of all places, the President was shot by a leftist. And, everyone who has worked on a political campaign has used language with militaristic significance, starting with the word "campaign." That said, the sins of the Left are not currently sins of violence but sins of intellectual narrowness. There are no more Weathermen and the Black Panthers play dress-up and do not intimidate anyone. But, I do not believe there is anything intrinsically violent about the Right versus the Left. The disposition to turn to violence seems to have no ideological pedigree.

So, Kinsley is right to point out that there may not be any "balance" between the rhetoric on the right versus the rhetoric on the left, although Keith Olbermann seems determined to prove him wrong. But, even Kinsley acknowledges that such a judgment tells us nothing about what happened at the Tucson Safeway.

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[1] http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0111/47383.html