

# THE MINDSET OF JARED LEE LOUGHNER

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## INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the horrific mass shooting in Tucson on January 8 that killed six people, including U.S. District Judge John M. Roll, and injured fourteen others, among them U.S. Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, speculation has understandably been intense over the possible motives of the suspected shooter, 22-year-old Jared Lee Loughner.

Loughner's identified on-line writings and videos on sites such as MySpace and YouTube—his "Internet footprint"—are few in number, but do provide some evidence of his state of mind. In addition, it appears that Loughner, using the screen name Erad3, posted writings on the conspiracy-oriented Web site "Above Top Secret." These postings provide more illumination about Loughner's probable mindset in recent months.

Taken together, Loughner's often disjointed, rambling and semi-coherent writings suggest someone who probably is not associated with any particular extremist groups or movements, but has a generic distrust of government and a vague interest in conspiracy theories. They are indicative of an individual who has been exposed to a number of different ideas, from across the political spectrum, and has sometimes appropriated external concepts – often seemingly divorced from their original context. However, Loughner's writings do not provide any solid body of evidence or any patterns that would seem clearly to point to a particular ideology or belief system as a significant motivating factor.

In his writings, Loughner repeatedly returns to certain topics, including grammar, literacy, and "logic;" distrust of the government; and religion.

## GRAMMAR, LITERACY, AND "LOGIC"

One set of subjects Loughner seems often to try to address are "grammar" and "literacy." For example, in a YouTube video titled "Hello," composed of screen shots of typed remarks, Loughner tells his audience that his hope for them is to be literate: "If you're literate in English grammar, then you comprehend English grammar. The majority of people, who reside in District-8, are illiterate—hilarious. I don't control your English grammar structure, but you control your English grammar structure."

Some viewers have interpreted these remarks as being potentially anti-immigrant in nature, suggesting that Loughner referred to Hispanic immigrants when he mentioned illiterate people. However, this may be a misinterpretation, because Loughner repeatedly calls people illiterate, including whites. For example,

when he sent a link to one of his YouTube videos to all of his Myspace "friends"—who consisted largely of younger, white women—he introduced the link by saying "Hello, I know you're illiterate!" In a "goodbye" message he posted on Myspace in January 2011, he asked his friends not to be mad at him and stated that "The literacy rate is below 5%. I haven't talked to one person who is literate..." In a post on the "Above Top Secret" Forum in July 2010, user Erad3 similarly criticized another person's post and suggested that the other poster had not been taught literacy in school.

Similarly, on his YouTube profile, Loughner stated that his favorite interest was reading and that he "studied grammar." In one of his videos, he seemed to claim that the government was brainwashing people by "controlling grammar." In an April 2010 comment he left on someone's Myspace profile, he asked and answered an odd question: "Dude! What is the best part about 9/11? WE DIDN'T HAVE CORRECT GRAMMAR!"

Loughner had a similar interest in what he considered to be inductive and deductive reasoning. "This is the point of starting a thread," user Erad3 stated on the "Above Top Secret" forum. "To post about certain topics in inductive and deductive arguments." Erad3 repeatedly referred to inductive and deductive reasoning in his posts on the forum.

This fascination may have even affected the way Loughner wrote, which repeatedly employed a sort of pseudo-logical three-sentence style. The first sentence typically would typically postulate that if A were true, then B would be the case. The second sentence would invariably flatly assert that B was indeed the case. The third sentence then asserts that A must be true.

To take one example of many, in text accompanying one of his YouTube videos, in which an unidentified figure burns a flag, Loughner stated:

*"If there's no flag in the constitution then the flag in the film is unknown.  
There's no flag in the constitution.  
Therefore, the flag in the film is unknown."*

Similarly, user Erad3 on the "Above Top Secret" forums, in a thread on the space shuttle program, wrote:

*"If the design of the NASA Space Shuttle keeps the black body temperature of  $-454^{\circ}\text{F}$  from the outside orbit then the NASA Space Shuttle is at a temperature for human life.  
The NASA Space Shuttle isn't at a temperature for human life.  
Hence, the design of the NASA Space Shuttle doesn't keep the black body temperature of  $-454^{\circ}\text{F}$  from the outside orbit."*

It is in part Loughner's repeated use of such pseudo-logical structures that makes his posts so difficult to follow and made it nearly impossible for other "Above Top Secret" members to engage user Erad3 in meaningful conversation, often to their frustration.

## LOUGHNER AND THE GOVERNMENT

A second, more disjointed, theme that runs through Loughner's writings is distrust for and dislike of the government.

This theme manifested itself in various ways, but usually in ways that seemed to touch on Loughner's personal concerns or personal experiences, rather than ways that seemed explicitly ideological in nature. Loughner stated that he couldn't trust "the current government" because of "fabrications." However, this seemed to relate to his belief that somehow the government was brainwashing people by "controlling grammar."

Loughner expressed sentiments that could be interpreted as anti-police as well as against the community college he had earlier attended in Tucson (claiming that "the United States Constitution, which is the law, can be broken at this school"). These seem to relate to real life incidents involving Loughner and campus security at the community college.

In the Erad3 postings, one consistent anti-government topic broached is the notion of NASA faking spaceflights, including the Mars Rover landings. Erad3 seems to have thought that communication over distances as great as those between Earth and Mars was not possible; therefore, the landings were faked.

As expressed in his typical three-sentence structure:

*"NASA sends the Mars Rover to mars with communication or NASA fakes the situation.  
NASA didn't send the Mars Rover to mars with communication.  
Therefore, NASA fakes the situation."*

In one of his few fairly lucid statements, Erad3 elaborated that most people "just trust that people in authority are offering valid statements and conclusions and trust that they wouldn't lie. But in reality all of us base our mental constructs upon the ideas of others, not our own observations."

The third theme that Loughner returned to involving the government deals—vaguely—with the concept of "currency." Typically, Loughner wrapped this concept together with his other beliefs about brainwashing and grammar. However, this area also included one of Loughner's only explicitly ideological statements, albeit a passing one.

Near the end of one of his videos, entitled "My Final Thoughts," Loughner briefly proclaimed "No! I won't pay debt with a currency that's not backed by gold and silver!" This is clearly a reference to a concept prevalent in the anti-government and right-wing "Patriot" movement that only gold and silver, not paper money, is valid currency. However, neither in this video nor elsewhere does Loughner elaborate on this statement, or even where he might have learned of the concept.

However, the "Above Top Secret" forum may offer some illumination. During the summer of 2010, user Erad3 started a discussion thread titled "Infinite Source of Currency!?!?" In this thread, he asked if it were possible for there to be an "infinite source of currency." The rest of his posting was not particularly coherent, but dealt with the notion of the Treasury creating an infinite amount of new currencies (he seemed to relate "infinite currency" to a similar-sounding concept he had of "infinite language").

The "Above Top Secret" forum deals with all sorts of conspiracy theories, but does include anti-government extremists in its membership, who tend to concentrate on "Patriot" style anti-government conspiracy theories. Some of the responses to Erad3's query were from people who clearly believed that paper money was worthless or even invalid. Though Erad3's responses to such postings did not indicate that he agreed with such messages, this may be where he originally picked up the notion.

## LOUGHNER AND RELIGION

One opinion clearly expressed in Loughner's on-line expressions is a distrust or dislike of religion, especially Christianity. In one of his YouTube videos, Loughner claimed that he refused to write a religious preference on an Army recruiting form and, later in the same video, after making the currency statement mentioned above, he proclaimed "No! I won't trust in God!"

The user Erad3 postings elaborated on these sentiments and represented his most clearly expressed views on society. In these postings, in his unique style, he repeatedly mocked Christianity and those who believe in it. Often he expressed a belief that the Bible was pure fiction, as in this example from July 2010:

*"If Christianity philosophy is non-fiction writing then there's a [sic] author for the literature.  
There's no author for the literature.  
Therefore, Christianity philosophy is not non-fiction writing.  
Crap on anyone who is believing Christianity without evidence of a writer!"*

That same day, in another thread, user Erad3 made an almost identical posting that included Buddhism as well as Christianity. A few days later, he stated that "God couldn't be a possible."

Often, user Erad3 seemed irritated that "Above Top Secret" forum members even started discussion threads related to religion. "There's not one writer that can justify the books as theirs," he said in one thread about the Bible. "There's no need to post in this thread!" In another post, he proclaimed the Bible a "very sad and pathetic attempt for something to talk about!" Posting in response to another religiously oriented thread, he wrote simply "Crap on God! Crap on God! Crap on God! Talk to the toilet seat for a [sic] hour."

## OTHER SUBJECTS

In his on-line writings, including those postings by user Erad3, Loughner briefly and usually incoherently touched on a number of subjects, from evolution to Stephen Hawking to UFOs (of the existence of which he seemed to be skeptical).

Loughner's views on the subject of race have been the subject of much speculation, primarily because he listed Hitler's *Mein Kampf* on a list of books that he liked. However, Loughner also cited left-wing tracts such as Marx's *The Communist Manifesto*, as well as anti-authoritarian works from a variety of viewpoints, including *Animal Farm*, *Brave New World*, *We the Living*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Fahrenheit 451*. Among the works of fiction cited was the noted anti-racist classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

In the "Above Top Secret" postings of user Erad3, only one race-related message appears, and its meaning is cryptic. Replying to a thread on "Racism in the Gaming Industry in America," Erad3 replied that "the American games are far better than any others! They have a higher rate of play than any other. You cannot prove that there isn't racism, so it be! There's no need to have multiple characters of different ethnicity."

In the end, the writings so far revealed seem to indicate no particular leanings about race, and it is difficult to come away from the postings with such a conclusion.