In Praise of Deliberation: President Barack Obama and Sarah Palin Discuss the Tucson, Arizona Shooting

Abstract:

What are the consequences of speaking in praise of deliberation? This essay offers a reading of two influential responses to the Tucson, Arizona shooting—President Obama’s speech at the Tucson Memorial and Sarah Palin’s YouTube video—to argue that the way in which the speeches create a dichotomy between language and violence can have damaging effects. This view of language figures deliberation as liberating and violence as debasing and containing a clearly identifiable actor who delivers immediate, bodily harm. This view prevents discussion of what Slavoj Zizek calls the underlying, “structural violence” of a system, instead focusing the attention only on the subjective image of a “lone gunman” bursting into the scene. This paper concludes by offering ways to address some of the deep, structural problems of the Tucson shooting: mental health policy and stigma towards the mentally ill.