

FRIDAY: HOW IT BEGINS

I was half way through a post yesterday when a friend in the UK told me a member of Parliament had been killed by a fascist.

An assassination, I thought at that moment, unable to write another word for my post. How many times has an assassination kicked off a horrible chain of events?

I hoped and prayed as best a lapsed Catholic can that the murder of MP Jo Cox by a man shouting, "Britain First!" was not the beginning of something dreadful. Research says it's less likely than if an autocratic figure had been killed, but who can really say with certainty?

We won't know for some time if this was a trigger event for something else, though it did set off a cascade of stomach-turning crap. So many media outlets referred to politician Cox's death by a political fanatic as something other than an assassination. Really? Would Cox have been targeted had she not been a pro-EU unity supporter? Would the assassin – characterized by so many euphemisms as mentally ill – have killed her had he not been rabidly anti-EU and racist, impelled by ramped-up anti-EU rhetoric in advance of the EU-Brexit referendum?

And the disparity in coverage between [*lone white gunman suspected of mental illness*] and [*armed terrorist–labeled so because they're not white*]? Beyond disgusting. The racism is all the more obvious. The public is conditioned by media's implicit bias to expect and accept the lone white gunman, but never the dark-skinned person bearing a weapon. The accused must have sympathized with white nationalism, irrespective of country, having bought his firearm components from U.S. neo-Nazis more than a decade ago. The description of his attack on Cox is chilling – it was a cold political execution, not just some wildly insane flailing without care for the outcome.

The world lost someone very special when Jo Cox

died yesterday. Someone who lived progressive values out in the open, modeling a better way for us. Don't kid yourself this was just a crazed man acting alone when white nationalist politicians like Nigel Farage believe "violence is the next step" if angry constituents feel they've lost control.

And don't fool yourself into believing this was an isolated event occurring in a vacuum.

Today's Friday jazz is a performance of She's Crying for Me by the Yorkshire Jazz Band, in honor of Jo Cox's home county.

A note on hacking stories

The breach of the DNC's computers is one of a number of stories over the last several years following a pattern: the breach is attributed to one entity and then yet another entity, while the story itself has a rather interesting point of origin. Initial reports may say the hackers were affiliated with [*nation/state X*] and later reports attribute the hacking to [*unaligned third party Y*] – or a variation on this order – a key characteristic is the story's immaculate birth.

Try looking for yourself for the earliest story reporting the hacking of the DNC. Who reported it and when? Who were the original sources? Did the story arise from a call to law enforcement or a police report, and a local beat reporter who gathered named eyewitnesses for quotes? Or did the story just pop out of thin air, perhaps simultaneously across multiple outlets all regurgitating the same thing at the same time?

My point: Be more skeptical. There's an adage in reporting, drummed into journalism students' heads: *If your mother says she loves you, check it out.*

Three examples of manipulated opinion

Speaking of being more skeptical, bias manifests itself in all manner of ways and can be easily used for good or ill.

- U.S. government and military

orgs tricked into running 'imposter code' (Ars Technica) – Suckers didn't perform due diligence on packages of code hosted at developer communities before running them. Gee, I wonder if any political parties' personnel might have done the same thing...

- GOP-led House waffles on HR 5293 surveillance bill because Orlando (HuffPo) – Ugh. Would this vote have been different this time if a lone crazed white gunman had shot up a bar? Sadly, we can't tell based on the bill's approval last year because the vote took place one day before Dylan Roof's mass shooting in a Charleston church. Nor can we tell from the bill's 2014 approval by the House because the mass shootings the week of the vote were just plain old run-of-the-mill apolitical/non-racist with too few fatalities.
- Send manuscripts out under a man's name = agents and publishers notice (Jezebel) – If you're a woman you can be a great writer and you won't get any nibbles on your manuscript – unless you

submit it under a male name.
Hello, implicit bias, much?
This isn't the only example,
either.

Worthwhile long read

This commentary at Tor.com looks at the movie V for Vendetta, saying it's "more important than ever," in spite of the adaptation's rejection by Alan Moore, author of the graphic novel on which this film was based. The essay was published this past Tuesday; read it now in light of Jo Cox's assassination Thursday. A single event can change perception. This line alone now means something very different to me:

It seems strange that my life should end in such a terrible place. But for three years I had roses, and apologized to no one.

If time permits, I may slap up a post this weekend to make up for yesterday's writer's block. Otherwise I'll catch you on Monday.