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OUR VIEW

Playing the blame game

In the wake of Friday’s horrific massacre in which 50 mosque worshippers were slaughtered by a gunman in Christchurch, New Zealand, social media exploded almost immediately with theories and opinions about who was ultimately to blame for the carnage.



CHRIS RUSH
COMMENT

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced that a suspect, Brenton Harrison Tarrant, 28, an Australian citizen, has been charged with murder and will be tried in New Zealand. He could also face additional terrorism charges.

The prime minister immediately seemed to blame her nation’s laws. “There will be changes to our gun laws,” said Arden, who has directed the nation’s attorney general to explore the possibility of banning all semi-automatic weapons.

Even though the crime took place on the opposite side of the planet from America, some could not resist the urge to blame the past rhetoric of President Donald Trump for creating an environment in which white nationalism/white supremacy could flourish. The alleged shooter published a racist manifesto and appears to have been influenced by social media. At least one prominent American Muslim



leader and several media commentators attempted to place the blame at Trump’s feet for not being tougher on white nationalism and racism in the U.S.

Some blamed the idea of a monolithic worldwide white supremacy movement. In a commentary for The Daily Beast, Christopher Dickey wrote, “Tarrant may have been a lone shooter when he slaughtered 50 people at two mosques in New Zealand on Friday, but he was not a ‘lone wolf.’ He was part of a much wider movement that is every bit as extensive as Al Qaeda was when it attacked the United States in 2001, and potentially much more dangerous to the future of Western democracies.”

Australian Sen. Fraser Anning

wrote a letter after the New Zealand attack that appears to blame the victims. He came under harsh criticism for writing and tweeting, among other things, “Does anyone still dispute the link between Muslim immigration and violence?” For his less than sensitive candor, Mr. Anning was rewarded with a raw egg crushed over his head by a young man during a weekend press conference.

Back in the U.S., a young woman confronted Chelsea Clinton, daughter of former President Bill Clinton and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, for pointing out the anti-Semitic remarks of U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn). The accuser, who appeared to be wearing a Bernie Sanders-inspired T-shirt, blasted Ms. Clinton for

allegedly fomenting violence against Muslims because of her remarks.

These are just a sampling of the highlights (lowlights?) of the blame game that erupted mere hours after the crime was committed. Just days after the fact, there appears to be no limit to the amount of blame being cast about for either religious, political or social purposes. Fingers have been pointed at “the others” and harsh words have been exchanged.

We should all be wary of these shameless blame merchants who attempt to spin the tragedy of others into their own myopic narratives.

This may be the unfortunate result of, if not the primary motive behind, this type of brutal, premeditated killing — to set one group against another: Christians versus Muslims, white skin versus brown skin, right-wing politics versus left wing politics.

We should all fight against this primal urge to blame the “other” and respond in kind, which would only serve to perpetuate the cycle of violence. For now, it is enough to mourn the dead and seek justice against the known suspect — the man who actually planned and perpetrated this horrific crime.

Regardless of his political leanings, social media diet, or personal racial bias, he is ultimately the one who is legally and morally responsible for his own actions.

OTHER VIEWS

Don’t confuse real voter fraud with rhetoric

The (Greensboro, North Carolina) News & Record

To recklessly throw around claims of voting fraud is to play a dangerous game that could cause lasting harm to our democracy.

Yet politicians from the White House to the local level are indulging in that game more and more. Social media and casual conversation cheer them on.

NPR pointed out a recent high-profile example last week: Asked about the absentee ballot tampering in North Carolina’s 9th Congressional District that has prompted a new election, President Donald Trump gave an answer designed to confuse. Saying he condemns “any voter fraud,” the president went on to talk not about the improprieties surrounding the thrown-out election of Republican Mark Harris but rather the unsubstantiated claims of “a million fraudulent votes” in California.

Despite such frequently repeated claims of massive problems, the evidence shows that outright voter fraud is rare in this country. What happened in Bladen County is noteworthy also because it doesn’t look much like the fears that are usually raised by inflammatory rhetoric about voter fraud: that hordes of illegal immigrants or people using names of dead voters are going to the polls.

Rather than worrying about actual absentee ballot tampering, some Republicans in the North Carolina legislature have been using false and vague charges of voter fraud to try to win support for suppressing minority voters.

As the NPR report noted, politicians often use charges of “fraud” to confuse the issue when what they’re really worried about is people whose voting choices they might not like. They are, in short, afraid of democracy.

People in both parties can play the game. Some use emotionally loaded words such as “purge” to exaggerate such procedures as challenging registrations.

The danger is that Americans will begin to have serious doubts about the democratic process and the results of our elections. And if their candidate loses, people might conclude that the election was rigged. Then what happens?

We’re already seeing the hard-won gains in voting rights for minorities being eroded because of fears.

The country is deeply divided.

We have to contend with Russians and others manipulating social media to make us lose faith in our system.

We don’t need our political leaders further whipping up divisions and doubts with reckless and misleading rhetoric.

OTHER VIEWS

A St. Patrick’s Day miracle



TIMOTHY EGAN
COMMENT

For going on three years now, Britain has taken a holiday from sanity. A tiny island kingdom whose people once ruled nearly a fourth of the world’s land area squabbles over the terms of its self-inflicted diminishing and isolation.

And really, who cares? Those who believe that history has a wicked sense of humor should care. From the depths of British bungling, hubris and incompetence is emerging a St. Patrick’s Day miracle: the real chance of a united Ireland.

After more than 800 years, it’s not just possible but also seems inevitable that London’s ruling reach will no longer extend to part of the island west of the Irish Sea. All of the centuries when borders from India to Africa, from the Middle East to British Columbia, were drawn by besotted and bewigged Englishmen may end with the whimpering last gasps of Brexit.

Delay Brexit, redo Brexit, no-deal Brexit. It hardly matters. As with the fall of the Berlin Wall, you can sense the acceleration toward the inevitable. Don’t wait for Her Majesty’s government to resolve the sovereignty issues of Northern Ireland, which are now holding up the divorce between Britain and the European Union. There is no solution.

Bear with me while I walk through the Groundhog Day of this muddle. When Britain voted narrowly in 2016 to leave the union, it did so in a fit of nationalism and xenophobia, and against the will of majorities in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Voters were promised a migrant-free Britain, unfettered from evil globalists. Instead, they are getting a Balkanized Britain, its stagnant economy at the mercy of forces they will no longer be able to influ-

ence in Europe. The vote was a Trump-level temper tantrum that revealed the fraudulence of conservative populism.

What has bollixed the formal exit — and is the root cause of all of the rudderless rumblings in Parliament this week — is Northern Ireland. As always, the most vexing of Britain’s old colonial possessions is the one closest to Westminster.

The Brexit vote roused the ghosts from bloody eras past, those centuries when it was a crime to be Irish in Ireland. The Troubles, three decades of late-20th century sectarian terror that took at least 3,500 lives, was the latest iteration of that dead weight of memory.

“It almost didn’t matter where you started the story: it was always there,” Patrick Radden Keefe writes in “Say Nothing,” his magnificent account of the awful years in the north.

The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 ended the Troubles. Remarkably, it has held the peace, while essentially erasing the border between the Republic of Ireland and the swath of historic Ulster belonging to Britain.

No one wants to put up guard stations and customs checks along the invisible 310-mile line separating prosperous Ireland, a member of the EU, from the shakily peaceful six counties of the north, which would exit. And only the most hateful elements on both sides want a return of violence that is sure to come with a hard border.

The solution? It’s there in the not-so-fine print of the peace agreement. Should a majority of Northern Ireland residents desire to leave Britain, it is required to call for a vote of those people.

That majority is fast approaching. What Prime Minister Theresa

May of Britain calls “our precious union” is held together by 10 members of Parliament representing the old hatreds of North Ireland — the Democratic Unionist Party. It was founded by Ian Paisley, a bigot with a Bible, who opposed the peace agreement and referred to Catholics as scum who “multiply like vermin.”

Keefe quotes an English journalist as saying that the unionists are “more British than the British, about whom the British care not at all.”

Paisley is no longer with us. Nor is most of the dark sentiment he stirred up. When the borders came down, so did many of the walls of religion and nationality. Catholics, long a persecuted minority, will soon be a majority in Northern Ireland if demographic trends continue.

But the conflict is less about one Christian sect against another. It’s more about how to thrive in an interconnected world. The Republic of Ireland is proudly progressive, led by an openly gay taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, who is of Irish and Indian heritage. After a series of scandals, the influence of the Catholic Church has diminished. Last year, Ireland had the fastest-growing economy in Europe. Given a choice, a majority in Northern Ireland could well be persuaded to ditch what is left of feckless and intemperate Britain and form a single Irish nation — if for no other reason than they like the benefits that come with being a small country in the EU. Of course, many things would still have to fall in place. But the stars are aligning.

Remember: This was all Britain’s doing, unintentional though it was. Hope and history don’t usually rhyme. More often, they bump into each other. That happy accident could result a single Irish nation finally free of foreign rule.

Timothy Egan is a columnist for the New York Times.

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