

The Silencing of Readers' Commentary: British Media Admits its Cowardice over Paris Terror Attacks

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From the horse's mouth: For fear of upsetting readers, the paper silenced any commentary in the first days after the Paris attacks that might have suggested there was a causal relationship between western foreign policy in the Middle East and those events.

Instead, writes the Guardian reader's editor Chris Elliott, the paper waited several days before giving some limited space to that viewpoint:

On the Opinion pages, one factor taken into consideration was timing – judging when readers would be willing to engage with an idea that in the first 24 hours after the attacks may have jarred. The idea that these horrific attacks have causes and that one of those causes may be the west's policies is something that in the immediate aftermath might inspire anger. Three days later, it's a point of view that should be heard.

In other words, the liberal Guardian held off offering a counter-narrative about the attacks, and a deeply plausible one at that, until popular opinion had hardened into a consensus manipulated by the rightwing media: “the terrorists hate us for our freedoms”, “we need to bomb them even harder”, “Islam is a religion of hatred” etc.

Excluding legitimate analyses of profoundly important events like those in Paris when they are most needed is not responsible, careful journalism. It is dangerous cowardice. It is most definitely not a politically neutral position. It provides room for hatred and bigotry to take root, and allows political elites to exploit those debased emotions to justify and advance their own, invariably destructive foreign policy agendas.

In the paragraph above, Elliott happily concedes that this is the default position of mainstream liberal media like the Guardian.

Notes:

www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/nov/23/what-we-got-right-and-wrong-in-coverage-of-the-paris-attacks#sthash.w5GcneVc.dpuf

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