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Britain

What Jason Arday's death says about our society

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A tragic death as a man is hounded to suicide by a right wing campaign and the British press. What must we learn from it?

Jason Arday is dead. The 41 year old Black academic from Cambridge was hounded by the British press for the last few weeks with accusations of plagiarism and outlandish stories about his personal life. The nation was gripped, intrigued about it, forgetting there was a human at the centre of it, someone with a life to live. Someone whose only possible 'crime' was academic plagiarism.

The entire story came about because of one racist fanatic, Nathan Cofnas. Cofnas had been sacked from his Cambridge job for saying that Black people were not intelligent and without Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) hiring practices such as positive discrimination they would only succeed as entertainers and athletes. This wretched man recast himself as a crusader, going through Black academics' careers and publications to find any dirt or inconsistencies, any publications that might show academic malpractice to prove his point. He found Arday's PhD from Liverpool John Moore University and claimed it was largely plagiarised.

Liverpool John Moore stood by their decision to issue him the PhD. Any subsequent investigation was between Arday, his employer and the university that awarded the PhD. But it was made into a public spectacle by sinister right wing forces, desperate to prove a wider point, and conduct a public trial to hang a Black man's career.

And this is the first claxon for racism. The press rubbed their hands with glee – salivating at the prospect of tearing down Arday. Arday was subjected to intense media scrutiny beyond anything a white academic has received in living memory. Lists are already circulating of white academics accused of fabrications or embellishments in their intellectual work, but The Telegraph and The Times were not interviewing their ex-students to get a character profile on those teachers. It was not just the right wing press, the Guardian also contributed several articles on his situation.

Modern academia

And what does this tell us about modern academia? An institution rife with accusations of plagiarism. When the future of academia itself is being called into question due to pretty much every student, as well as some academics, using AI to write and mark papers? When there is a replicability crisis in science, researchers and academics unable to replicate the alleged outcomes of their peers to establish consistent results?

People have said that Arday was a fantasist and many of us read online the incredible claims of long distance running prowess and how much money he raised for charity. He had recently been paid £1.4 million for his memoirs. But how many of us know people that embellish stories? Make up facts? How many of us have lied on our CVs? Fake it till you make it. Hustle culture. Arday spoke about being an autistic Black man trying to navigate the world. Battling that crushing feeling of irrelevance in a world that tells you that you don't matter or you should get back in your box.

Arday was put under a spotlight and subjected to the court of public opinion and the feeling that all the things he had said did not stack up became more evident. But how many other people walking around would also crumple under similar levels of national scrutiny with full time journalists going through your personal life looking for dirt?

Let's be real, self promotion is necessary to modern life. Creating a narrative about your own life for credibility is what every celebrity does, what every politician does, what your mate down the pub going through a divorce does, what your friend does when she's feeling hurt and wants to ego project confidence. Arday might have gone further than most and was hoping to make money from his memoirs, but this constant drive for celebrity, recognition and fame is something built into capitalism, into how we are encouraged to see humans as geniuses or 'people with incredible stories' that get turned into movies. The recent The Salt Path controversy is just another example of the way the book industry encourages these stories.

No doubt people will blame the university for hiring someone "unsuitable for the job". Shifting the blame onto DEI initiatives – already under attack by the far right – and away from the racist witch hunters. In an academic system built on hypocrisy, elitism and increasingly grasping after whatever scraps of money they can get to survive – late stage capitalism hates intellectuals – we face deeper problems than a possibly plagiarised PhD. Even if the university was to have taken disciplinary action it wasn't the Telegraph's job to decide who lives and who dies.

Lynching

What was the point of any of it beyond the obvious desire to see a Black man's career get hung?

Some will say it was tragic that he died but – he set the cause of racial equality back because of his behaviour. The reality is Arday was held to a higher standard than any white academic and it was the racists and the media making this into an intense publicity storm that is the real danger here.

The more we look at the forces arraigned against Arday the more it feels like a political motivated assassination. Or a public lynching.

This sad event reminds me of Pat Parker's 1985 poem Jonestown about how behind the tragic death of oppressively racialised people lies the reality of a society that did not care about them, that punished them for who they were or could not support those people with mental health issues or autism or any of the thousand other aspects of humanity:

"No one had ever cared

that much about me before

and it came home

the messages of my youth

came clear

the Black people

in Jonestown

did not commit suicide

they were murdered

they were murdered in

small southern towns

they were murdered in

big northern cities

they were murdered

as school children

by teachers who didn't care

they were murdered

by policemen

who didn't care

they were murdered

by welfare workers

who didn't care

they were murdered

by church people

who didn't care

they were murdered

by politicians

who didn't care

they didn't die at Jonestown

they went to Jonestown dead

[...]

they died in

the school rooms

they died

in the streets

they died

in the bars

they died

in the jails

they died

in the churches

they died

in the welfare lines

Black folks do not

Black folks do not

Black folks do not commit suicide."

This is the cold reality: Jason Arday was driven to his death by a cruel world that was using the excuse of academic rigour as a cover to destroy someone that they hated. They hate him because he was Black and they want to remove Black people from public life. Jason Arday was a casualty in the race war that the far right aims to inflict on Britain, and people like Elon Musk are actively agitating for.

And right now I care far more about that than I do about someone allegedly copying parts of their PhD.

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Source: [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).

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