

Triple-Happenstance

Nobody asked but ...

Have you ever heard a phrase similar to “bad news comes in threes?” It seems to be true, but it says here that this is not a mystery but a vagary of human communication. Why does it seem that there are 3 reports of shark attacks? Well, the swimming season opens, and soon there is a shark attack or sighting. It’s news (first time in the season). A second attack occurs and its confirmation of the news and a harbinger of a potential trend. A third attack occurs and it is confirmation of the trend. By the time the fourth attack occurs, the trend has already been exploited, so the newshounds have gone off to sniff out new trends.

We saw a troubling version of this phenomenon recently. The “rally” in Charlottesville caused the newshounds to perk up their hounding instincts. Lo, and behold, another “rally” (an unfortunate occurrence of event labeling) was held in Boston. Even though there was no real connection between the two events, the media treated them as the same trend. Many panties were wadded. One guy even lost his job. Now, we need to BOLO (be on the lookout) for contenders for event #3. Let us not have our jimmies rustled by every gathering of 3 or more humans.

— Kilgore Forelle