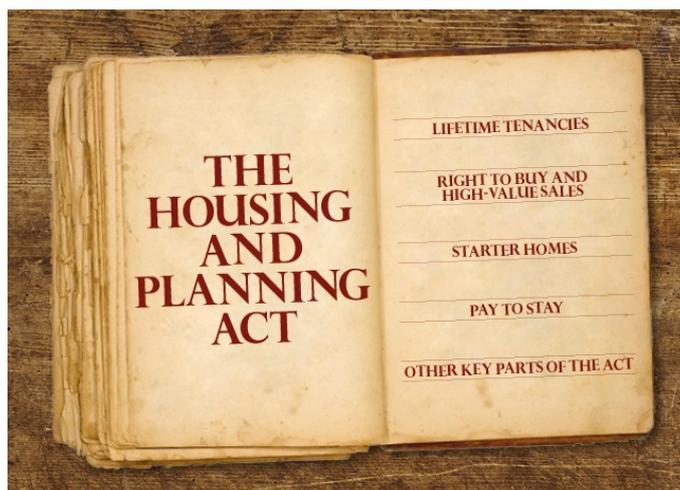


## It was 2016 that done it, guv

By **Lisa McKenzie** – @redrumlisa

Few will be sad to see the back of 2016, as it reaches its finale. This rotation by the Earth around the sun is apparently to blame for the tectonic shifts in our social and political systems, celebrity deaths, and the general unease we all feel about the next few years. As a sociologist, I have watched and fully immersed myself in this collective pass-the-parcel of blame; I have been part of it, and I have contributed to it, as have we all if we are being truly honest with ourselves.



Source: Inside Housing

As the year kicked off, admittedly, I was not optimistic. The Housing and Planning Bill was about to be debated and undoubtedly sail its way through Parliament and into our communities. Housing has been in the top 5 of most people's concerns in the last few years and this would mean even more devastation for working class families. The eventual goal of the Bill is to ensure that all publicly owned and social housing will eventually end up in the hands of private ownership – consequently, in London there will be new, and then constant, waves of social cleansing as rents rise, the remaining social housing and publicly owned property will end up in the hands of those that wish to make profit rather than make a home. Outside of London the consequences are that local councils will lose what little interest they have in building and maintaining social and council housing, as it all will ultimately will be available for sale. I look into 2017 and I know that the slumlords will return in the numbers that we in the UK have not witnessed since the early 1960s. This feels personal to me, having spent most of my life living in council housing that has sat on the sites of the bulldozed and once privately owned slum terraces.

Was it 2016 that allowed this destructive and nasty piece of legislation to go through and become sanctioned by our parliamentary system?

As the weather eventually warmed up, most of us started paying initially little attention to the forthcoming referendum that would ask us as a nation 'Whether we want to remain or leave the European Union?' In April this appeared to be a forgone conclusion, after all why would a government call for a referendum that they wouldn't win? Referendums are used by politicians to strengthen their political power base, even if that means dividing a nation. The campaigning started properly in April, and we realised that it would be a long eight weeks until June 23<sup>rd</sup> as politicians, celebrities, and pundits lined up faithfully behind the In or Out campaigns, all led by Tory politicians. Those of opposing party political persuasions held their noses and got into bed with one or another, except the Scottish Nationalists, they knew either way they would make

political capital from it. There was little to no debate at all about the legitimacy of the referendum, and no campaign at all for a political abstention.

Was it 2016 that allowed this destructive and nasty political stunt to exist?



Source: YouTube

In May both sides of the of the referendum debate became more hysterical: 'Vote Leave' claimed they would give the NHS £350 million a week; Nigel Farage used the Oswald Mosley book of politics to lead his campaign for leaving the EU – a separate campaign from the official campaign to 'Vote Leave'. It was getting complicated. The Remain campaign began to sound like Henny Penny or Chicken Little (if you come from the USA) and beyond the white noise of political-speak most of us could hear little but 'the sky is falling'. By June the country began taking sides, the progressive clever people that had university degrees and lived in the major cities and read the *Guardian* newspaper declared their undying love for Europe, whilst the racists, the stupid people, and Nigel Farage all hated Europe and they all read the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*. The media narrative was this simplistic and this divisive and stakes were ramping up during June.

On June 16<sup>th</sup> mother of two young children and Labour MP Jo Cox was murdered on the streets of Yorkshire by a man shouting 'Britain First'.



Source: BBC News

Did 2016 murder Jo Cox?

As the referendum approached, the polls tightened, but Remain was still in the lead. I didn't vote, I didn't want to legitimize the political game playing.

There was so much anger throughout the country; it was completely depressing to me. The research that I do is about class

inequality; working class people in the post-industrial communities where I come from I knew would vote Leave, I know how difficult their lives have been for several generations. Low- and no-pay work have worn them down, their communities have been devastated by de-industrialisation and they knew that no one cared. They were angry and hopeless. Equally, I have been working with a group of working class women in East London, they too were voting Leave, they were angry but like all working class Londoners they live in fear that they will become homeless, or that their family members and friends will be forced to leave London and they will be alone. I wrote an article that was published in the *Guardian* in June saying so. I was called a racist.

Was it 2016 that made working class people throughout the UK frightened, and angry?

I stayed up like millions of others until David Dimbleby on the BBC told us 'We're Out. Britain has voted to leave the European Union'.

During the summer the Prime Minister David Cameron and sidekick George Osborne had to resign their positions, I enjoyed that bit. They were replaced by Theresa May and another Tory; the Labour Party fell to pieces.

I think it was 2016 that did it.



Source: Business Insider

The US election began; Donald Trump ran a campaign that came straight out of the Oswald Mosley book of politics. Hillary Clinton was going to smash the glass ceiling and become the first rich white powerful elite woman to be President of the United States. In November Donald Trump won. Chicken Little (or if you are British, Henny Penny) ran around shouting ‘the sky is falling’. This time 2016 wasn’t blamed; instead the Rust Belt working class of the USA was in the frame.

2016 is over. However, the fear, uncertainty, and the divisions that have been created by those who benefit from such things remain; some benefit out of the

economic capital that is taken from peoples precarity, from their low pay, and they hoard their wealth like a dragon hoarding gold; others benefit from political capital they gain when fear and division runs through our societies. I don’t blame 2016 for any of this, I know who or what is to blame. In 2017, as academics, as sociologists, as societies we need to fight for a better system that does not allow profit from fear, anger, or division. The sky has not fallen in but we are at the end of a political, social, and economic era. Change is coming whether we like it or not, and we cannot continue to blame the cycle of the earth going round the sun.

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**About the author:** Lisa is one of the Editors of the *Researching Sociology@LSE* blog, and is an academic at the LSE. To find out more about Lisa’s work, click [here](#).

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