

On Brian Daubach
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What's in a name?

The past couple of days I read a biography of the labor leader Joe Hill (William Adler, *The Man Who Never Died*, Bloomsbury, 2011). In 1914, Hill was convicted of murder, and in 1915 he was executed by a Utah firing squad amid international controversy. Many thought Hill was framed and put to death because of his radical leanings as a prominent figure in the International Workers of the World labor organization, or Wobblies as they were called. Hill became labor's most venerated martyr and was immortalized in the ballad "I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night," a song celebrated by Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan and such.

Hill's real name was Joel Hagglund, and I got to thinking about whether he would have gone over as well, or at all, if he hadn't changed his name. Take for instance the lyrics of his big song:

I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night
Alive as you and me.
Says I, "But Joe, you're ten years dead."
"I never died," says he.
"I never died," says he.

How would it have played if it were "I dreamed I saw Joel Hagglund last night," and "But Joel, you're ten years dead." Maybe not so well. See where I'm going with this?

Another song commemorating him has a verse that goes

"Joe Hill ain't dead," he says to me.
"Joe Hill ain't never died."
Where workingmen are out on strike,
Joe Hill is at their side.

Would they be singing "Joel Hagglund ain't dead" and "Joel Hagglund is at their side"? I suspect people would be prone to accept the fact that Joel Hagglund is in fact dead.

Musing about all this with Joe Hill brought to mind someone I've thought about frequently the last couple of years, Brian Daubach. Daubach was a first baseman for the Boston Red Sox about a decade ago. As for how good he was at his job playing baseball, he was about as good as you'd expect someone named Brian Daubach to be, you get my point? Seriously, I wonder if the great Red Sox slugger Ted Williams could have hit .400, as he did in 1941, if he had had the name Brian Daubach.

I find myself thinking about how it would be if prominent people had the name Brian Daubach.

John Lennon. The same exact guy except his name was Brian Daubach: would he have written "Strawberry Fields Forever"? "Strawberry Fields Forever" by Brian Daubach? Brian Daubach and Yoko Ono? I'm not sure.

And Martin Luther King. Would we have a Brian Daubach holiday every January? Maybe not.

If Albert Einstein had been christened Brian Daubach, would he have been *Time* magazine's Person of the Century?

And Franklin Delano Roosevelt . . .