
Opinion: A [very] short conversation with Propaganda Central

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As a long-time resident of Crescent City, a veteran of a long-ago war, and with an interest in what happens in the outside world, I'm a subscriber to the on-line edition of the New York Times.

Normally, reading the Times is a one-way street. But recently, a column by David Brooks in that paper got more than my usual interest and it's occurred to me that my neighbors here might be interested in what happened. So here it is:

In their January 30th edition, the NYT published a column by David Brooks entitled, The Six Principles of Stupidity. This immediately caught my attention because it has occurred to me that propaganda can be thought of as the intentional propagation of ignorance. From this perspective, the propaganda outlets, such as the NYT, act as Typhoid Mary's which infect entire populations, not with the once common disease known as Typhoid Fever, but rather with simple ignorance.

So here was the NYT, the flagship of the US propaganda fleet, writing about what it itself does for a living.

Of course, I read Brooks' column with considerable interest, but the paragraph in which he explicitly defines stupidity really got my attention and I decided to write to him about it.

This is what I wrote:

Dear Mr. Brooks,

I was attracted by the title of your column headlined, **The Six Principles of Stupidity** and read it carefully.

This paragraph from your column, in which you define stupidity, seems worthy of further attention.

I define stupidity as behaving in a way that ignores the question: What would happen next? If somebody comes up to you and says, “I think I’m going to take a hike in a lightning storm with a copper antenna on my head.”

Stupidity replies, “That sounds like a really great idea!” Stupidity is the tendency to take actions that hurt you and the people around you.

I define stupidity as behaving in a way that ignores the question: What would happen next? If a NATO policymaker comes up to you and says, “I think I’m going to move NATO right up to the Russian border,” stupidity replies, “That sounds like a really great idea!” Stupidity is the tendency to take actions that hurt you and the people around you.

My revision of his test would have defined the NYT’s support of NATO’s eastward expansion as stupid and would have raised similar issues about himself as an employee of that newspaper.

Unfortunately, he did not respond to my email. Did he realize that he’d stepped into his own trap?

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