

A Case of Political Stockholm Syndrome

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A bizarre thing happened in November of 2010. Millions of ill-informed Americans went to the voting booths and shot themselves in the foot. Frustrated with the economic woes the country has been facing, certain people were somehow persuaded (by a cadre of shrewd charlatans and corporate-sponsored dogma-mongers) to vote for the political party that *caused the mess in the first place*. That so many civilians could be so thoroughly duped is bewildering. Yet such an occurrence seems to be oddly commonplace.

The Republican Party—as usual—proved to be very, very powerful. As well funded as it is (by plutocrats and Big Business), the G.O.P. Machine was able to convince the most ill-informed, credulous segments of the population that supporting right-wing policies was in everyone's best interest. That these were the very policies that brought about the economic problems with which we're now contending seemed not to pose a problem.

To add insult to injury, most of the candidates that ran on the right-wing platform were some of the least educated and most dishonest people in society. Such disturbing traits seemed not to deter certain voters from putting these kinds of people into positions of power. Our public discourse has been thoroughly hijacked by right wing polemic—and the professional bloviators that disseminate it. In this political climate, smart, knowledgeable people seem not to have much of a chance in elections.

(The penchant toward credulity and hyper-dogmatism in the demographic voting ultra-far right on *economic* matters is reflected in the pattern for credulity and hyper-dogmatism within the same demographic on *other* matters. For example, well over half of the Tea Party thinks the Bible is the literal word of God, and that the U.S. was founded as a Christian nation. It's no big leap to convincing such people that trickle down economics works and that highly concentrated private power is not a problem.)

Anger and frustration have an astonishing way of sabotaging the brain's rational faculties. When people are angry or frustrated, the pre-frontal cortex idles as the amygdala floods it with dopamine. It becomes easy to persuade otherwise sane people to do almost anything—no matter how foolish—when they are aggravated. Under such conditions, people often abandon critical thinking and make ridiculous decisions...even decisions that will hurt them. Couple this with the fact that millions of Americans don't have even a basic grasp of elementary economics, and the recipe for G.O.P. success is complete.

Right-wing propaganda has proven tragically effective: It convinced millions of people that the best thing to do was put those who CAUSED the current economic problems BACK INTO power. This is analogous to surveying one's burning house, panicking, then frantically hiring the arsonist to put out the fire—while adamantly demanding that the fire department go away. In other words, the G.O.P. persuaded millions of people to do the unthinkable: Demand that those who've been doing all the right things to extinguish the flames LEAVE...while insisting that those who set the fire *return to the burning house*. Those who SET the fire, then, are seen as the best people for saving the house from complete destruction.

Even worse, it's like blaming the fire department for the burning house...while believing that arsonists are—in general—the best way to stop conflagrations. The G.O.P. managed to convince millions of impressionable people that torches and gasoline (the things used to start the fire in the first place) are now better for extinguishing the flames than the WATER the fire department was using to stop the damage.

As the house burned, the electorate was offered a choice: flame-throwers or water-hoses. Millions selected the former. Why? The answer: A complete lack of understanding of what causes fires, and what extinguishes them. Glorification of the arsonists resulted from right-wing agitprop.

To make the scenario even more flabbergasting, during the 21 months the fire department was doing what it could to douse the flames, provide help to the wounded, and set the stage for repairing the structural damage, the arsonists were sabotaging the noble effort *every step of the way*...then declaring: “See! Look! They’re not fixing things fast enough. That must mean that they’re doing everything wrong. Kick them out and hire us instead!”

On November 2, the uneducated and credulous eagerly obliged.

It is no secret that the economic catastrophe that occurred was caused by the right-wing’s disastrous economic policies. This makes it all the more exasperating that it’s now the ULTRA-right-wing ideologues to whom millions are turning for solutions. However, once we see the appeal of the absurd myths that were so successfully promulgated, the explanation for November 2 becomes more clear. (See my essays on Neoliberal Newspeak and on Tea Party rhetoric.)

What will now happen is quite simple: the Republican Party will do everything in its power to serve its corporate paymasters—to continue the disastrous economic policies that caused the economic catastrophe in the first place. It will do all of this while insisting that they’re SOLVING the problem—a problem that they still refuse to take responsibility for. Meanwhile, they’ll point to the Democratic Party, accusing “liberals” for the mess the Republicans caused. It’s brilliantly diabolical. And it’s working marvelously.

In 2010, the Republican strategy was wonderfully simple: Accuse “liberals” of failing to clean up the mess the Republicans caused—even as the Republicans perpetually hijacked the effort to fix things for the last 21 months. In other words: Blame a fire department that has been handicapped by the arsonists—then look for salvation from the arsonists. The arsonists win; everyone else loses. The house will not be repaired...and future fires will continue to ignite.

A brief survey of the right wing’s contributions in the last 21 months:

- The “bailout” was defective not because it was a capital infusion used to avert the collapse of banks (the fallout from which would have entailed negative externalities of fatal proportions)...but because, *due to pressure from the right wing*, there were almost *no strings attached*. The investment banks will thus continue to engage in hyper-speculation, unchecked. Disaster averted; underlying problem left in place.
- Contrary to the claims of the right wing, the “stimulus” *worked*, but didn’t do a better job *stimulating* because—as all economists concur—it wasn’t nearly BIG ENOUGH. Why not? The Democrats capitulated to pressure from the right wing. Consequently, public infrastructure will continue to be egregiously under-funded...and *demand* will remain sclerotic for even longer.
- Healthcare reform was good, but has the problems that it DOES have largely because the (crucial) public option was omitted—due to congress’s capitulation to the right wing (AHIP, PhRMA, the Chamber of Commerce, etc.) As a result, the horrendously inefficient for-profit, sickness-treatment industry will remain in place. In other words, the healthcare legislation was beneficial insofar as the left was able to write it according to Progressive ideals, and was deficient insofar as it was gutted by the right wing. The right wing then complains about the flaws.

- The military-industrial complex is still horrifically out of control. Why? Capitulation to the right wing (most notably: to the war profiteers). The 2011 Pentagon budget is now well over \$1 TRILLION dollars. This is abominable—*ten times* what it should be. Corporate socialism reigns supreme, per the right wing agenda.
- Campaign Finance Reform? Non-existent. Why? Capitulation to the right wing (i.e. the demands of the corporate lobbies). In other words, the defects to the system will remain in place that CAUSED the financial catastrophe—per the right wing’s demands.
- The Democrats’ attempt to cut taxes for 98% of the general population was blocked simply because the right wing insisted that the richest 2% retain the (disastrous) Bush-era tax-cuts—rather than merely go back to the tax-rates of the booming 90’s. Income inequality and wealth concentration, already at ridiculous levels, will continue to be exacerbated, per the right wing’s plutocratic agenda.
- Financial reform was a slight improvement, but was woefully inadequate because the Democrats allowed it to be utterly gutted by...you guessed it...*the right wing*. There will therefore continue to be lack of regulation, lack of oversight, lack of transparency and lack accountability in the investment banking industry... and continued State-corporate collusion.

The pattern here couldn’t be more glaring. (By “right wing”, in each case, one can read “*corporate power*”. In other words: the arsonists.) For those seduced by the propaganda churned out by the Republican Machine, votes were placed for the arsonists. Why? In their eyes: The fire department wasn’t putting out the fire fast enough.

It is important to note that, in the last 21 months, the arsonists sabotaged the fire engines, set up roadblocks on every street between the fire station and the burning house, and complained each time the firemen attempted to use the water hoses. “Wasn’t it the water hoses that CAUSED the fire to begin with?!” the Republicans cried. “We need MORE of what we were doing leading up to the economic crisis!” they conclude. “More gas! More flammable building materials! Fewer safety measures! No need for fire alarms!” Millions were persuaded by this nutty argument. The result: November 2, 2010.

The explanation for such a preposterous phenomenon is complicated. It has to do with the effectiveness of right-wing propaganda...coupled with a colossal lack of understanding of even basic economics on the part of the easily-duped portion of the electorate. The G.O.P. counts on enough people being oblivious to even the most elementary facts of economic policy. Only under such degenerate conditions can corporatists seduce the credulous with snazzy sales pitches—selling a thoroughly-debunked right-wing ideology to people hungry for a magical solution. To the untutored ear, the claims SOUND good. They’re simple, they’re catchy...and they’re all flagrantly wrong.

Propagating myths about the “free market” and “trickle down economics”, preaching the *supply-side* gospel, indoctrinating the malleable-minded into the theology of Neoliberalism (free market fundamentalism, anarcho-capitalism): all of it proved tragically effective during the first 21 months of the Obama administration. On November 2, 2010, this was demonstrated at the ballot box. Fetishization of the “free market” is alive and well. Demonization of the State: complete.

Turning to the rapist to be saved from being raped seems to be a rather insane thing to do. Yet, those duped by the right-wing propaganda are somehow convinced that if there are LESS regulations on banking and corporate power, if the super-rich are allowed to have even MORE money, and if LESS money is invested in public infrastructure and social services, then the rank and file will somehow fair better. One could call this kind of thinking “electoral schizophrenia”.

Being seduced by one’s assailant is, indeed, a kind of Stockholm Syndrome. Of course, falling for those who would only do us harm is not unheard of: The battered wife who always goes back to her abusive husband, the consumers who always return to the same scams, the eager followers who keep listening to the same charlatans—forever mislead. And, of course: A rabble that is persuaded to keep voting for

Republicans because the Neoliberal sophistry sounds so appealing to them.

Such fraudulent claims only seem credible to those who are utterly oblivious to the rudimentary principles of economics: fiscal multipliers, socio-economic stratification, power asymmetries, etc. But no matter: In politics, perception is everything—while Reality is a moot point. So long as the G.O.P. can manipulate perceptions, the Neoliberal agenda can persist...and Reality will be obfuscated. Who is duped by this bunkum? Primarily those residing in rural America: those with the worst public education systems.

The right wing's strategy is quite simple: Do everything possible to sabotage ANY effort to improve things while the Democratic Party is at the helm...all in order to make the Democratic Party LOOK BAD. In other words, prevent anything beneficial from happening under Obama, even if it means screwing over the general populace, so that the Democrats don't have any chance to appear in a good light to the electorate. ONLY THEN can the G.O.P. step in and make the case that the Dems are impotent.

In other words: Only by sabotaging otherwise good legislation can the Republicans put forth the claim that the good legislation is bad...and then offer their alternative. The arsonists' plan: Make the firemen appear to be the arsonists, then dress up as the firemen. The sabotaged fire engines are evidence that the fire department isn't the answer to burning houses.

The political version of Stockholm Syndrome is a peculiar and befuddling phenomenon to observe. But those of us who are freethinkers and well-informed should not be baffled when things like this happen. Rather, we should recognize it for what it is...and try to find explanations so that its occurrence can be averted—or at least minimized. Understanding / diagnosis isn't enough, but it's a prerequisite for addressing the problem. At the end of the day, the solution: better education. Debunking Neoliberal Newspeak is step #1.

However, this simple prescription poses a problem: What comes first, better education or the implementation of genuinely progressive policies? It's a chicken-or-the-egg conundrum. It seems that both need to happen *in tandem*—as each fuels the other—or NEITHER can happen. Just as the right wing is symbiotic with a poorly educated, ill-informed general populace, Progressivism is—as it always has been—symbiotic with a well-educated, well-informed citizenry. We seem to find ourselves in a bit of a pickle. But take heart, the predicament is not intractable.

Bottom line: We need a much more bold, confident, uncompromising Progressive movement. We need a savvy, strong, *genuinely* Progressive political party—not the *Republican-lite* currently offered by an amorphous Democratic Party (a party that is semi-corporatist and capitulates to the far-right wing over and over and over). Only then can we emerge from this disheartening predicament.

The Democrats lost big in 2010 because they didn't stick to Progressive principles, thereby disenchanting the Progressives who helped elect them. While in power, the Democrats needlessly caved in to the G.O.P. time and time again—thereby shooting themselves in the foot (just as did the portion of the electorate that—in voting Republican—supported the political forces that have harmed us for the last few decades).

It is important to note: Half the Democratic seats lost in the House were “Blue Dog” seats (a.k.a. the DINO). Moreover, half of the “Blue Dogs” up for re-election LOST, while 94% of those in the Progressive caucus WON. In other words, the MODERATE corporatists lost seats to the ULTRA corporatists—simply because the latter went further with the same misleading-yet-seductive message. *If one has decided one wants beer, why go for the Coors Lite when Sam Adams is being offered?* Blue Dogs were simply watered-down Republicans. Meanwhile, those who stuck to Progressive principles did fantastically well against the right-wing assault.

The approval rating of the Democrats is relatively low—but much of the disapproval comes from the LEFT.

In other words, the low approval can partly be attributed to the fact that the Dems went too far to the RIGHT. Many who “disapprove” in the polls are the Progressives who feel jilted. (This is the lesson learned earlier in 2010 in Massachusetts.)

To re-iterate: it was the Progressives that were best able to hold onto their seats. November 2, 2010 was, ironically, a vindication of Progressivism. Just as they did after the 2008 financial collapse, Progressives are now saying, “I told you so.” But few listened to them. It’s like *déjà vu*.

It’s time to start listening to the *intellectual* elite (a.k.a. the “left”) and to stop listening to the *financial* elite and those beholden to them (a.k.a. the right-wing, a.k.a. the corporatists, a.k.a. the arsonists). Many of us don’t even know the difference between these two groups. To conflate the two under a common label (“elites”) is to equate polar opposites. It’s like calling arsonists fire-fighters.

Our choice is quite clear: Heed the insights of the bona fide scholars, or cave to the demands of the plutocrats / corporatists. In other words, trust those who’ve repeatedly been egregiously wrong...or trust those who’ve consistently been proven right. The watered-down version of the right wing (a.k.a. the current form of the Democratic Party) isn’t going to cut it. Only by *completely* repudiating corporatism can headway be made. If only the Democratic Party was genuinely progressive, the G.O.P. wouldn’t have a chance.

It’s time to take a stand. The right wing can only be overcome by ceasing to play the right wing’s game—by putting our collective foot down, and saying: “Enough’s enough.” Taking measures to ensure that the typical person on the street knows the first thing about basic economics is a good first step. Only when the public becomes better educated will right-wing propaganda cease to infect millions. The Stockholm Syndrome is not incurable.

What are we waiting for?

POST-SCRIPT 1:

Amusingly, the week after I wrote this essay (penned Wednesday, 11/3/10), *The New Yorker*’s leading article (Talk of the Town, 11/15/10) used the same metaphor. I quote:

“By the time the flames reached their height, the arsonists had slunk off, and only the firemen were left for people to take out their ire on. The result is a kind of political cognitive dissonance. Frightened by joblessness, ‘the American people’ rewarded [those (the arsonists) who] not only opposed the stimulus but also blocked the extension of unemployment benefits. Alarmed by a ballooning national debt, they rewarded [those (the arsonists) who] not only transformed budget surpluses into budget deficits, but also proposed to inflate the debt by hundreds of billions with a permanent tax cut for the least needy 2%. Frustrated by what they see as inaction [by the fire department], they rewarded the party that not only fought every effort to mitigate the crisis, but also forced the watering down of whatever it couldn’t block.”

Here, what I called “political Stockholm Syndrome” is delightfully explained by “political cognitive dissonance”. However, the arsonists never “slunk off”. They stuck around, and simply masqueraded as fire-prevention experts.

Echoing me, the editors used the economy-as-burning-house and the corporatists-as-arsonists analogy. Here, the legislation pushed by the Democrats (the fire department) became a target—the target that the ignorant part of the electorate took their anger out on. The arsonists successfully deflected blame for their own deeds—channeling the resentment and frustration to the fire department—all in an astonishing feat of

misdirection. Propaganda has proven to be a powerful thing, indeed!

By default, the G.O.P. (i.e. the corporatists) were looked to for salvation by the ill-informed and credulous segments of the populations. The result: Blame the firemen for the continued fire...and hire the arsonists to put out the flames. The problem, the editors pointed out, was “public ignorance”.

The *New Yorker* article went on to make the following important point:

2/3 of the electorate were under the impression that, under the Democrats, middle-class taxes had GONE UP (when, in fact, they’d GONE DOWN), that the economy had shrunk (when, in fact, the economy has GROWN), and that the billions lent to banks under TARP are lost (when the State may now actually make a profit off of it). Conclusion: Ignorance explains the vote for the arsonists.

This same ill-informed, credulous segment also became convinced that illegal immigration is skyrocketing (when, in fact, it has gone way down) and that the healthcare legislation will exacerbate the deficit (when, in fact, the GAO and CBO show that it will REDUCE the deficit).

In other words: right-wing propaganda WORKED. It convinced the least educated parts of the population of all these un-true things. As the *New Yorker* said, “Reality tells a different story.” However, perception, not Reality, dictates voting trends. The *New Yorker* asks: “But why don’t ‘the American people’ know these things?” (!) The answer involves a combination of a poorly-informed, poorly-educated citizenry and a well-funded, right-wing propaganda machine.

Indeed, Reality DOES tell a different story. For 95% of us, taxes are actually LOWER due to the 2008-09 legislation. The stimulus provided other tax cuts for people of modest means, including breaks for college tuition...all while mitigating unemployment. The stimulus would have done an even BETTER job if only it had been BIGGER.

By election day, the economy had been growing for 5 straight quarters. Most of the TARP loans have been repaid, and the remainder will be soon—plus a modest profit for the American people. The healthcare legislation not only makes healthcare MORE efficient (i.e. cost-effective) for the general populace, but curbs insurance company abuses while making healthcare accessible to more people...AND more efficient.

The most fascinating case-study in political Stockholm Syndrome was the voting of ill-informed seniors. This segment gave a new meaning to shooting oneself in the foot. Healthcare legislation passed by the Dems will make Medicare more efficient while the G.O.P. desperately wants to dismantle Medicare. Yet, somehow, right-wing propaganda was able to pull off the astonishing feat of convincing credulous and ignorant seniors that the new legislation would HURT them, and that the Republicans will HELP them.

The new legislation will slow the growth in Medicare spending over the next decade—NOT by cutting service, but by cutting WASTE. This will save tax-payers half a trillion dollars over that period: cost savings from more efficient care even as provisions benefiting seniors are AUGMENTED (e.g. closing the notorious “doughnut hole” that had soaked seniors for obscene amounts of money). YET...right-wing propaganda duped seniors into thinking that the Healthcare reform was BAD for them.

Lastly, we’ve observed the naïve ideology of the infamous “deficit hawks”, who fetishize debt reduction via divestment in social services and public infrastructure. They make deficit reduction an end in itself—something to be pursued at all costs. This is based on the misconception that State debt is analogous to household / personal debt. This thinking is asinine. Meanwhile, they can’t even put their money where their mouth is. GENUINE deficit hawks would do three things that right-wingers obstinately refuse to do:

- 1) Repeal the Bush tax-cuts on the super-rich, which would be the single thing that would reduce the deficit the most.
- 2) Reduce the military-industrial complex and mega-farm subsidies, accounting for the largest portion of Federal outlays.
- 3) Heed progressive efforts to make healthcare more efficient

These three steps are obvious. Alas, the so-called “deficit hawks” will do none of these things because each of them would displease their corporate paymasters.

In the end, the G.O.P. and corporate power managed to convince large swaths of credulous people of glaring falsehoods. Such egregious mis-impressions dictated voting decisions that benefited the plutocrats and corporatists (i.e. those who caused the fire). Indeed, “Reality tells a different story.” However, Reality doesn’t matter when propaganda is powerful enough to persuade millions that the arsonists can save our burning house and that the fire department is responsible for the flames.

POST-SCRIPT 2:

More evidence has re-enforced the thesis: If only Obama and the Democrats had been MORE progressive (i.e. not made so many concessions to the G.O.P.), they would have fared better in the 2010 mid-term elections. The turn-out numbers support this claim in two basic ways:

First, 2/3 of the number who voted in 2008 (during the Democrats’ victories in the executive and legislative branches) voted in 2010.

Second, significantly MORE conservatives voted in 2010 than in 2008.

This means that perhaps HALF of the Progressive base came out to vote in 2010 as had in 2008. Why? They were disenchanted. In other words, if the Progressive segment of the electorate had been more galvanized (by seeing genuinely progressive legislation in the past two years), FAR more would have been mobilized for the 2010 mid-term elections. Meanwhile, right-wing propaganda would not have had the chance to be as effective as misleading millions—and rallying credulous crowds to support the corporatist agenda.

Moreover, the Obama narrative would have been much more clear and decisive if it has stuck to genuinely progressive ideals...thus avoiding the vague and cloudy narrative that was difficult to promote. The Dems—beholden to corporate and banking lobbies—ended up confusing their message by hedging this way and that—equivocating and vacillating without a simple, bold, CONSISTENT message. In politics, perception is everything.

In the end, people gravitated to the most APPEALING narrative, not to the most accurate. What makes a narrative enticing is confidence, simplicity and straight-forwardness. The Dems’ narrative had neither clarity nor consistency: it was an awkward hybrid of corporatism and pseudo-progressivism—a package that appealed to NOBODY.

One must always ask: Is the narrative being offered easily digestible and catchy? If the answer is yes, *its credence is a moot point*. As colossally defective as the Republicans’ narrative was, it was easily digestible and quite catchy—clear and simple. The Republic Machine mobilized a cult following. Like most cults, it orchestrated a highly-disciplined message. As egregiously wrong-headed as the

message was, it was packaged to sell like hotcakes to an ill-informed, credulous electorate. With message-discipline like that, and a cult following, they could have sold sand in the middle of a desert—and the followers would have guzzled it down as if it were potable water.

Meanwhile, the Democrats' blurry blend of neutered progressivism and veiled corporatism had zero appeal.

Incessantly capitulating to corporate power is not exactly delivering a clear message—or a worthwhile alternative to the corporatism-on-steroids offered by the G.O.P. Moreover, the Democrats' PR was utterly horrendous: They couldn't have sold discounted bottled water in the middle of a desert to people dying of thirst. The Republicans called their sand "water"...and put "sand" labels on the bottles of water being offered by Progressives. Millions went for it—and now have bottles of sand labeled "water" as a means to survive in the middle of a drought. Meanwhile, the plutocrats are laughing all the way to the bank.

The conclusion is unavoidable: If the Dems had held to Progressive principles instead of incessantly capitulating to the right wing, and had actually EXPLAINED the merit of Progressive policies, they probably would have done well on November 2, 2010. Obama moved FAR too far right, betraying the principles that led most people to support him 2 years ago—and rendering his narrative un-sellable to those looking for clear, concise answers. When people are in the dark, groping in desperation for something to hold onto, as soon as they find something that seems solid, they'll grasp onto it—and not let go.

POSTSCRIPT 3:

Right-Wing Propaganda: The Mendacious Charade Continues:

A case-study in right-wing shenanigans is the G.O.P.'s handling of the mid-term elections of 2010.

The predicament:

"We set the house on fire...but now need to deflect the blame."

The play: Prevent measures to extinguish the fire...then point to the fire department as the flames continue to burn.

"After the firemen arrive, impede and sabotage every effort they make to extinguish the flames. THEN—when the house is still burning—we can convince naïve people that the fire department's activities are to blame for the continued conflagration. We can thereby persuade the credulous portion of the electorate to hire US, the arsonists, for damage-control."

The ruse worked. "See! Look! The fire is still burning! Therefore, the Democrats are doing something wrong." The most credulous portion of the electorate swallowed this narrative—hook, line and sinker.

A wider look at the right wing's modus operandi since 2009 is in order.

The scenario:

"The fallout from the damage we caused is severe. If 'the left' is able to push progressive policies, then things will improve for most people...and the Democratic Party will look really good...thereby precluding our chances for getting back into power."

Conclusion:

"We must do whatever it takes to ensure the Democratic Party doesn't succeed—doesn't do ANYTHING good for society—lest they garner credence with the general populace...and get credit for fixing things.

Moreover, if Progressive policies are allowed to be implemented, people will see that they WORK.

This must not be allowed to happen—lest right-wing policies be revealed for the shame they really are, and

the G.O.P. falls into permanent disrepute.”

The strategy:

“Prevent ANY effective legislation from passing, so that things remain as bad as possible while the Democrats are at the helm...so that we can turn around and blame them for all society’s woes. Obfuscate these machinations by seducing credulous, ill-informed people with an enticing narrative.”

This stunt was pulled off with staggering aplomb. How? Money, money, money. Since the right-wing agenda favors plutocrats and corporate power, plutocrats and corporate power were more than happy to throw oceans of cash at this effort. Being so well-funded, the right-wing propaganda machine was able to execute its game-plan.

The primary vehicles for this game-plan are the celebrity talking heads and the dogma-mongers—figures who are subsidized by plutocrats and Big Business. Professional bloviators are merely touting the ideologies that they are HIRED to tout by their corporate benefactors. They are paid to push the agenda of their paymasters. Using media to promulgate corporatist propaganda is the primary way of undermining populist support for Progressive policies. Only an uneducated citizenry can be so easily duped. The key is to keep everyone “dumb”: distracted, oblivious, ill-informed. If everyone was better-informed, the G.O.P. would quite literally cease to exist—as its support would dwindle to the narrow sectors of wealth and power that it serves: perhaps 2% of the population.

The tens of millions who support the G.O.P. only do so because they don’t know any better. Most of them are honest, well-intentioned people who are simply horrendously misled.