

Lies, Propaganda and “Political Brainwashing”. Remembering and Forgetting

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What is the explanation for the brainwashing of so many Americans when it involves the nefarious, unspeakable deeds of their government? Why are so many so easily duped time and again? Why is there such a vast ignorance of the truth behind national and international affairs?

I would suggest that the answer lies not just with the specific issues themselves and the lies and propaganda used to befuddle the American people, but with the cultural and social background that frames Americans’ thinking. The latter serves to cut to the root people’s belief in their own power to think freely and clearly about the former. Invade people’s minds over many years with an ongoing series of interconnected memes, occupy their minds with alleged facts that induce a frenzied depression, and then fooling them on specific issues — e.g. Ukraine, Iraq, Syria, etc. — becomes much easier.

I am a sociology professor, and my students always laugh when during a discussion of memory, social and personal, I ask them about their forgetties (the actual word is forgetteries, but the shorter rhyme gets more laughs). They think I’m joking. Maybe you do, too. I’m not.

But when I suggest that if they “possess” the faculty to remember, then they must “possess” the faculty to forget, they are astonished. You can’t forget, they reply, you just don’t remember; you can’t retrieve the memories that are stored in your brain. In other words, there are no forgottens, just temporarily unavailable memories. From there we are onto a discussion of retrieving (I think of dogs), processing (their word for thinking and mine for making American cheese), and all the computer lingo that has been the surround of their lives. Like fish in water, the mechanistic computer memes have been their environment since birth. They are shocked at the suggestion that there might be more outside the cultural water, and that they could go there.

And they have a lot of company.

This may sound flippant, but it’s crucial for understanding why so many Americans can’t comprehend and pay attention to the ways their minds are scrambled and confused about life and death issues, how their country has fallen victim to the military-industrial-intelligence apparatus that operates deep in the shadows, and oftentimes right in the open.

If we examine the social and cultural context of the last twenty-five years, we can see a number of issues that have dominated Americans’ “thinking.” These issues have been promulgated and repeated ad infinitum by the corporate media, professional classes, and

schools at all levels. We have been swimming in these issues for years. I suggest the following five are key: the inability to concentrate or pay attention (ADD/ADHD), memory/forgetting (dementia, Alzheimer's, technological memory devices), people's lack of time and constant busyness (a recent email I received from a publisher read: "crazy-busy? use our power-point decks"), drugs legal or illegal as problems or solutions (over 4 billion prescriptions written in the U.S.A. yearly), and technology as our savior.

Together with shopping and the weather, these five topics have been the stuff of endless conversations and media chatter over the years.

When people are questioned about major issues of war and peace; political assassinations, such as those of JFK, MLK, or RFK; the alleged war on terror; the downing of Malaysian airlines; the overthrow of elected governments in the Ukraine or Egypt; the events of 9/11; government spying; economic robbery by the elites — the list is long, it's common for people to echo the government/corporate media, or, if pressed, to say, I don't know, I can't remember, no one knows for sure, it's impossible to know, we'll never know, etc.. The confused responses are replete with an unacknowledged despair at ever arriving at clear and certain conclusions, not to say being able to do anything about them. On many issues they bounce between the twin absurdities of Democratic and Republican talking points, thinking they are being perceptive.

Why?

If we set aside the substantive issues, and examine the aforementioned cultural memes, the answers are not hard to find. Here most people speak as if they are certain. "Of course there isn't a forgettery." "Depression is caused by a chemical imbalance." "Memories are all stored in the brain." "I really am so busy all the time." "Facts are just opinions." Americans have internalized the ethos presented to them by the elites. At the core of this is the propaganda of scientific materialism and biological determinism that we are not free but are victims of our genes, neurotransmitters, brain/computers and chemicals, technology, etc. Having lost our minds and fixated on our brains, we have been taught to be determined to be determined, not free. And whether consciously or unconsciously, most have obliged. The linkages between memory, attention, distraction, drugs, technology all point to the brain and the obsessive cultural discussion of brain matters.

We have been told interminably that our lives revolve around our brains (our bodies) and that the answers to our problems lie with more brain research, drugs, genetic testing, etc. It is not coincidental that the U. S. government declared the 1990s the decade of brain research, followed up with 2000-2010 as the decade of the behavior project, and our present decade being devoted to mapping the brain and artificial intelligence, organized by the Office of Science and Technology Project and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. How convenient! George H. W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, Obama — what a difference! But this is science and the welfare of the world.

For years we have been fed philosophical presuppositions smuggled in as fact. It's an old trick, ever young. Tell people over and over and over again that life is in essence a mindless material/biological trap and over time they will believe it. Of course there are unspoken exceptions — those who are the masters of this con-game, the few, the elite, those who make and reinforce the case. And even some of them are too ignorant to comprehend their questionable presuppositions. They hoist themselves by their own petards while cashing in

at the bank.

My students can't forget because they don't believe in it. But they can't remember either. They don't know why. So, like the older generation, they fall into the careless habit of inaccuracy, to turn Oscar Wilde on his head. They have downloaded their memories, uploaded their trifles, and been tranquilized by trivia.

As the great American sociologist C. Wright Mills wrote over fifty years ago, "Nowadays people often feel that their private lives are a series of traps." That is truer today than then. A sense of entrapment and determinism pervades our culture. And it extends to public issues as well. We are told either to accept official explanations for public events or be dismissed as crazies.

I would suggest that for people to break through to a true understanding of the important public events of our time, they must also come to understand the false memes of their culture, the way they have been mindwashed to believe that at the most rudimentary level they are not free.

Maybe the first best step toward free thought and out of the propaganda trap would be to accept that you "possess" a forgettery. Listen to the American philosopher Paul Simon sing, "When I think back to all the crap I learned in high school, it's a wonder I can think at all." Use your forgettery and forget the crap. Make haste slowly to question everything. Remember that the corporate media works hand in glove with the ruling elites on two levels of propaganda — cultural and political, and it is necessary to understand how they are intertwined. Freedom is indivisible.

That's worth remembering.

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