

Grasping Reality with Both Hands

The weblog
of Brad DeLong. Since 1999.
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What Does Hanging wip phe New York Times Staff Do to People, Anyway?—Highlighted



Still mulling this over...

The insightful and usually highly reliable Michelle Goldberg makes, I think, a big mistake here.

& something bad does seem to happen often to many people when they start hanging around the *New York Times* newsroom. They lose their moral compass, and some (not Goldberg) forget that they are supposed to work for their readers and not for their insider sources and their bosses...

Ok, that ends the throat-clearing:

Here Goldberg half-defends Bennet and Sulzburger's decision to publish Senator Cotton's call for massive violence against demonstrating American citizens by the security services—even William F. Buckley would not go quite so far half a century ago, when all he was willing to say was that white supremacists in the south had the right to defend white supremacy against protesters "by any means necessary"—on the grounds that *New York Times* readers are ignorant of what people like Cotton think, "readers should grasp what people like Cotton are arguing... because it is being taken seriously" and "the very qualities that make Cotton's Op-Ed revolting...make him an important figure in Trump's Republican Party".

But to publish the thing without surrounding context—that's just to give Cotton a megaphone.

Yes, you can argue that the cure for speech is more speech. But you are wrong. The "more speech" has to appear in the appropriate time, place, and manner.

At some level, I think, Michelle Goldberg knows this. Near the end of her piece is one sentence: "The paper could convey his views by reporting on them, but for the Opinion section, letting him express them himself is more direct." Not "more effective" or "more informative" or "more useful". Why did she choose "direct"?

I think because she knew she could not use any of those other words:

Michelle Goldberg: *Tom Cotton's Fascist Op-Ed* <https://nomoremister.blogspot.com/2020/06/michelle-goldberg-gives-her-employers.html>: 'I figured he'd helpfully revealed himself as a dangerous authoritarian.... I can sort of appreciate my bosses' decision.... The Times Opinion section wants to include the views of people who support Trump... the very qualities that make Cotton's Op-Ed revolting—his strongman pretensions, his sneering apocalypticism—make him... important...

...Trump's Republican Party. (He might someday come to lead it.) Readers should grasp what people like Cotton are arguing, not because it's worth taking seriously but because it is being taken seriously, particularly by our mad and decomposing president.... The paper could convey his views by reporting on them, but for the Opinion section, letting him express them himself is more direct...

And Goldberg's conclusion? "Opinions of shape of earth differ". She won't say that Bennet's decision to publish was wrong. But she won't say that is right either. It is just as "crisis for our understandings of... marketplace[s] of ideas..."

It's important to understand what the people around the president are thinking. But if they're honest about what they're thinking, it's usually too disgusting to engage with. This creates a crisis for traditional understandings of how the so-called marketplace of ideas functions. It's a subsidiary of the crisis that has the country on fire.

#highlighted #journalalism #orangehairedbaboons #pubicsphere #moralresponsibility #2020-08-16

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Brad DeLong said...

It's been pointed out to me that I shouldn't have written "publish". I should have written "commissioned & sharpened". That further saws whatever fractions of legs existed on the table Michelle Goldberg is standing on here...

ReplyAugust 16, 2020 at 07:01

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