Twitter Thread by Paul Matzko



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The New York Times article about SlateStarCodex is finally out and it is...bad. There's a lot I could parse, but let me just walk you through one paragraph that is so misleading as to be

Take the first sentence of this paragraph. Now, technically the clause--"who proposed a link between race and IQ"--could simply modify "Murray" and have nothing to do w/ SSC.

> In one post, he aligned himself with Charles Murray, who proposed a link between race and I.Q. in "The Bell Curve." In another, he pointed out that Mr. Murray believes Black people "are genetically less intelligent than white people."

But 99% of readers are going to assume that the clause actually defines SSC's alignment with Murray. In other words, the author is strongly implying that SSC shares Murray's racist beliefs.

And that would be big(!)...if it were at all true. It is not. Indeed, if you go to the hyperlink, you'll find that SSC's purported "alignment" has nothing to do with Murray's "Bell Curve." https://t.co/REh3Ldpokq

What SSC & Murray agree about is that poverty is partly hereditable and thus very sticky, so much so that the proposition job retraining programs will meaningfully address mass economic disruption is a pie-in-the-sky fantasy.

Funnily, this is a mundane progressive policy stance. Oh no, SSC believes poverty is...cyclical! Quelle horreur! Job retraining is a sop for politicians to show they're doing something rather than a meaningful solution to the decline of mid-20th c factory towns?? May it never be!

What the journalist is doing is lazy. If SSC says he *ever* agreed on *anything* with Charles Murray, than he *must* agree with Murray on *everything.* And since Murray has racist views on race and genetics, SSC must--by the transitive power of bad journalism--share those views.

This is dumb. If I were to propose that, say, Bernie Sanders' past expressions of admiration for socialist economies necessarily means he supports every atrocity committed by any socialist regime, you'd tell me to get a grip (and spend less time hanging out with Ben Shapiro).

Now, the second sentence in the paragraph is equally problematic, and much harder to track down since the author provided no hyperlink. Here it is.

No wonder he didn't provide a link; it doesn't say what he implies it does!

https://t.co/4Q3GrFr2zN

The author's juxtaposition of this sentence w/ the first strongly implies that SSC agrees with Murray's racist proposition. It's the same transitive illogic again.

> In one post, he aligned himself with Charles Murray, who proposed a link between race and I.Q. in "The Bell Curve." In another, he pointed out that Mr. Murray believes Black people "are genetically less intelligent than white people."

But if you go and read the actual article, SSC is citing Murray not to agree with him but in order to parse the various ways that one might object to Murray's beliefs *as racist*.

> The only way I can make sense of this argument is to think of it as Definition By Motive trumping Definition By Belief. The first person is stating a belief that Muslims are more likely to be terrorists. The second person is questioning whether their motivation for restricting immigration is really this belief (in which case it would be ok) or if they're motivated by an irrational hatred of minorities (in which case it would be racism).
>
> Definition By Motive can even trump Definition By Belief when we're talking about innate/genetic difference. Consider Charles Murray saying that he believes black people are genetically less intelligent than white people. Some of Murray's critics object that this should be suppressed, even if true, because it could be used to justify racism.

In any case, the Times piece is chock full of sections which are, like this one, full of bad faith representation and accusation by grammatical implication. It's a bad piece that the @nytimes should yank.