



## Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

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**Disclaimer: The following "Letters to the Editor" were sent to the respective publications on the dates indicated. Some were printed but many were not. The original articles that are being commented on may or may not be available on the internet and may require registration or subscription to access if they are. Some of the original articles are syndicated and therefore may have appeared in other publications also.**

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17 August 2008

Editor, The New York  
Times Book Review  
229 West 43rd St.  
New York, NY 10036

To the Editor:

Thomas Frank is confused. First he argues, in 2004, that capitalist materialism has been unleashed on this great land by, of all things, Americans' failure to be sufficiently materialistic. Now he asserts that the gigantic and powerful lobbying industry currently astride Washington is the child of the same free-market ideology that has allegedly succeeded in inflicting

laissez faire on Americans ("What's the Matter With Washington?" August 17).

I waited in vain for reviewer Michael Lind to point out the obvious fact that, if the market really has become so dominant as Mr. Frank famously asserts, the government would have fewer, not more, favors to sell. Lobbying would be a dying industry.

Alas, the continued, kudzu-like growth of lobbying firms in Washington is powerful evidence against Mr. Frank's incessantly repeated insistence that free-market "idolaters" have shifted all power from government to markets.

17 August 2008

Editor, Washington Times

Dear Editor:

Herb Stark rightly distrusts politicians and shakes his head in wonder at the maneuvering to give Hillary Clinton her "own night" at the Democratic convention (Letters, August 17).

As H.L. Mencken observed, "The typical politician is not only a rascal but also a jackass, so he greatly values the puerile notoriety and adulation that sensible men try to avoid.... The one aim of all such persons is to

butter their own parsnips. They have no concept of the public good that can be differentiated from their concept of their own good." [Marion Elizabeth Rodgers, ed., *The Impossible Mencken* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 66-67]

Politicians of all parties are a blight and a curse. The civility of a society increases in proportion to how successfully its citizens resist infestations of these noxious pests.

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16 August 2008

Editor, Baltimore Sun

Dear Editor:

It's no surprise that an Intel Corp. attorney defends his company's pricing practices (Letters, August 16). But before dismissing this defense because it is self-interested, understand that the loudest complaints against Intel's prices are equally self-interested. They come from Intel's competitor, Advanced Micro Devices - which complains mostly about Intel's price CUTS.

Given our unavoidably imperfect knowledge, often in law the best we can do is to rely upon rules of thumb. And surely in antitrust regulation a worthwhile rule of thumb is to reject out of hand the complaints of any firm that cries that its competitors' prices are too low. History knows not a single example of consumers being harmed by firms lowering prices to capture larger market shares.

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15 August 2008

Editor, The Wall Street Journal  
200 Liberty Street  
New York, NY 10281

To the Editor:

Senators Sherrod Brown and Robert Bryd support the "Continued Dumping and Subsidy Offset Act," which would entitle American producers to collect big bucks by identifying foreign competitors who offer American consumers prices that Uncle Sam agrees to be "unfair" - that is, too low (Letters, August 15). Overlook the medieval superstition of a "just price" that contaminates this proposal and focus on the perverse incentives it creates for producers.

Rather than earn profits fairly by pleasing consumers with innovation and improved efficiencies, U.S. firms will steal profits unfairly by harming consumers with lawyers hired to win bounties for their masters by seeking out and destroying prices that consumers find especially attractive.

Far from attacking unfair commerce, Messrs. Brown

and Byrd are its great  
champions.

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14 August 2008

Editor, USA Today

Dear Editor:

Re: "Nicked-and-dimed"  
(August 14):

What would you predict about the quality and price of cars if Uncle Sam allowed NO foreign auto producers to compete domestically against GM, Ford, and Chrysler? The answer is obvious: Americans would pay exorbitant prices for shoddy cars.

So it's unsurprising that Americans pay exorbitant prices for shoddy air travel: Uncle Sam allows NO foreign airlines to compete on domestic routes against American-owned carriers.

The quality of air travel would rise and its price fall if Uncle Sam were to allow Americans to choose from among domestic AND foreign carriers for that flight to Grandma's for Thanksgiving and to the business meeting in Waukesha or Wilmington.

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13 August 2008

Editor, Financial Times

Dear Editor:

Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler seek to replace most government force with government "nudges" ("The dramatic effect of a firm nudge," August 12). They say that such nudging preserves "freedom of choice [as] an important safeguard against the bias, confusion and self-interest of government." While I agree that nudges are preferable to force, better still would be to stop government, as much as possible, from having ANY influence on persons' choices. Neither force nor nudging.

Prof. Sunstein and Thaler inadvertently offer a reason why government nudging is dangerous, namely, that government decision-making is biased, confused, and self-interested. Surely such an institution is not to be trusted to act wisely when it nudges us - especially if the authors are correct that we respond to nudges so dramatically.

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13 August 2008

Editor, The New York Times  
229 West 43rd St.  
New York, NY 10036

To the Editor:

Central to David Zinczenko's "case for governmental intervention" into the eating habits of poor Americans is the fact that, as he says, "a single grapefruit from a corner fruit stand costs two or more times as much as a few Chicken McNuggets" ("Los Angeles Stages a Fast Food Intervention," August 13).

Memo to Mr. Zinczenko: a major reason grapefruit costs so much is governmental intervention. Tariffs on imported grapefruit raise the price of this nutritious food. This anti-consumer effect is intensified by U.S.D.A. "marketing orders" requiring producers to withhold supplies that threaten to "destabilize" - that is, reduce - grapefruit prices.

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12 August 2008

Friends,

Today is the release date for The Encyclopedia of Libertarianism, edited by

Ronald Hamowy. This major reference work is published by Sage Publications and is a project of the Cato Institute:

<http://www.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?level1=B00&currTree=Subjects&prodId=Book232698>

In it, you'll find many excellent entries -- for example, Karol Boudreaux on Eminent Domain.

Publication of this Encyclopedia is a welcome event!