



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.

24 August 2008

Editor, Tri-City Herald

Dear Editor:

When I saw your headline "Obama Practices Humility Preached to Him" (August 24), I thought that the accompanying story must be a satire. But then I read the story and discovered that you're serious.

Get real. No truly humble person - no person who understands the limits of his own intelligence and capacity - parades around posing as the plural pronoun in the outrageously narcissistic chant "we are the change

we have been waiting for." No one with genuine humility utters anything so cocksure as Mr. Obama's promise to get one million 150-mpg cars on the road by 2015, or his vow to reduce Americans' carbon emissions by 80 percent (!) by 2050. Genuinely humble people don't presume to know how much profit earned by private companies is "windfall" - and they certainly don't formulate plans to confiscate such profits.

Indeed, no one within a light year of humility would want the kind of power and gaudy glory that Mr.

Obama so desperately seeks.

24 August 2008

Editor, Washington Post
1150 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

George Will is correct: most of Barack Obama's economic ideas are idiotic ("Little Rhetoric Riding Hood," August 24). But, along with many of John McCain's equally moronic ideas, they sell big-time - which is the very reason that these candidates persistently deliver such preposterous lines.

Washington is no less diligent than Hollywood at satisfying the public's demand for heroic adventures, epic fantasies, and fairy tales. Each production stars supercilious superstars portraying characters boasting magical powers and godly goodness.

The only difference between Hollywood and Washington is that, while audiences understand Hollywood's leading men and women to be acting, this same ability to distinguish fantasy from fact disappears when the feature show is Congress and the White House.

22 August 2008

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

To the Editor:

Jeffrey Lewis nicely recounts the experiment of a band using extreme improvisational methods to write music - no one or two identifiable composers, but participation by all band members ("Communist Songwriting (Sort Of)," August 19). Mr. Lewis described the goal: "The songs should never be the recognizable product of

one or two minds, but an ineffable, dreamlike synthesis of three or more participants in which the final result was sometimes quite mind-boggling."

Contrary to Mr. Lewis's claim, though, this method of composition has far more in common with the free market than it does with communism. Communism turned each individual into, at best, a robot with a tightly scripted role in a gigantic central plan. The communist ideal was PLANNED 'progress'; nothing was to be left to unreliable individual initiative. Everything was directed, in mind- and soul-numbing detail, from the top.

But in free markets - THERE the results are truly and marvelously mind-boggling. Consider the mundane pencil and ask: whose idea was it? Who planned its production from the raw-material stages (felling trees for the wood, drilling oil for the paint, mining bauxite for the ferrule and graphite for the 'lead') through to pencils' delivery to hundreds of thousands of retailers? The answer is no one. Pencils - and cars and MP3 players and aspirin and romantic B&Bs and you name it - are each the

creative, mind-boggling result, not of any one or two 'composers,' but of the efforts of millions of individuals each doing his or her thing in the feedback-rich environment of markets.

Play on!

21 August 2008

Editor, Washington Post
1150 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

Harold Meyerson insists yet again that America has lost its manufacturing, alleging also that investors are abandoning the U.S in favor of "nations with far cheaper workforces" ("Obama's Factory Factor," August 21). Mr. Meyerson singles out China as one such nation.

Facts utterly contradict Mr. Meyerson's fantasies. First, U.S. manufacturing revenues (adjusted for inflation) reached their all-time high in 2006. 2006 was also a peak year for inflation-adjusted manufacturing profits in the U.S. and for inflation-adjusted U.S. manufacturing exports. And the U.S. accounts for the largest share of the globe's manufacturing

output; Americans today produce 2.5 times more manufactured goods than do the Chinese.

[<http://www.free-trade.org/ManufacturingQuiz>]

Second, in 2007 the flow of per capita foreign direct investment into the U.S. was up 13 percent from 2006, to \$672. In China, it was up 14 percent - to \$55.

Harold Meyerson is a perfect example of the Beatles' "Nowhere Man": "He's as blind as he can be / Just sees what he wants to see."

20 August 2008

Editor, Washington Post
1150 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

The usually sharp Robert Samuelson is today unusually shaky about the "threat" that China allegedly poses to the world economy ("The Real China Threat," August 20). For example, consider his concern that China's exchange-rate policy keeps the prices of its exports too low. Where's the problem for the rest of the world? If China really is supplying goods to us non-Chinese at prices below the true cost of producing these

goods, it is forcing its citizens to subsidize our consumption. It is making China poorer while making other countries richer.

Mr. Samuelson would object that this policy harms manufacturers, especially those in poor countries. But suppose - not fantastically - that Chinese entrepreneurs devise production processes that dramatically lower the true cost of manufacturing in China. Manufacturers in other countries would be no less harmed than if China's low prices were the result of Beijing's currency policies, while the world's consumers would be no less benefited. The only difference between this scenario and today's (alleged) reality is that, in the latter case, China is made poorer.

19 August 2008

Editor, Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

Derrick Jackson wants government to reduce income differences among Americans ("Politely declining to touch the income gap," August 19). Forget that even poor Americans today generally have greater access to

goods and services than did middle-income Americans of a generation ago.

[<http://www.american.com/archive/2008/july-august-magazine-contents/how-are-we-doing>]

Instead ask: what kind of philosophy demands that government do what all decent parents teach their children not to do?

Who among us sends our children to school or to the playground with admonitions to begrudge classmates or playmates possessing nicer clothing or fancier toys? Who among us counsels our youngsters to form schoolyard coalitions for forcibly confiscating expensive sneakers and video games from 'rich' kids for "redistribution" to poorer kids? Who among us would not scold our children for such envy, and punish them severely if they participated in such thievery?

Children should avoid envy and learn to thrive by producing rather than by taking. The same is true of adults.

18 August 2008

Editor, The Wall Street Journal
200 Liberty Street

New York, NY 10281

To the Editor:

It's pro-competitive, not anticompetitive, for a retailer to contractually agree with a manufacturer not to charge prices below some minimum for that manufacturer's products ("Price-Fixing Makes Comeback After Supreme Court Ruling," August 18). Because information in markets is imperfect, consumers often and rationally read prices as signals of product quality. Manufacturers who are prevented from setting retail prices that signal their products' high quality will have less incentive to offer high-quality goods - and, hence, less incentive to compete on the basis of quality. Why incur the extra cost of producing higher-quality goods if consumers are inadequately informed about such quality and, therefore, too reluctant to pay prices commensurate with this higher quality?

Retailing is a furiously competitive industry. Competition among retailers - not only for consumer patronage but also for the best deals from manufacturers - ensures that retailers will not generally bind themselves

contractually to charging excessively high prices for the products they sell.

18 August 2008

Friends,

This six-minute-long clip from the great British comedy series "Yes, Prime Minister" exposes brilliantly -- and hilariously -- the arrogant presumptions of those who regard parents as being unqualified to make educational choices for their children (and who regard pols and bureaucrats as being worthy to be trusted with such choices):

<http://tertiumquids.blogspot.com/2008/08/required-viewing-on-school-choice.html>

18 August 2008

Editor, Washington Post
1150 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

Amity Shlaes rightly points out that in the 1930s "An irate Canada and many other nations retaliated" against the Smoot-Hawley tariff ("Five Ways to Wreck a Recovery," August 18). Take, for example, the case of eggs. Smoot-Hawley increased the tariff

on eggs by 25 percent, causing a 40 percent fall in egg imports from Canada. Canada responded by raising its tariff on U.S.-produced eggs by 233 percent - causing U.S. egg exports to Canada to fall from 11 million annually to a paltry 200,000. [See Jeffry Friedan, *Global Capitalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), p. 255]

Such retaliation isn't the only reason protectionism harms an economy, but it's a predictable and important one.