



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.

3 May 2009

Friends,

Here's a brief interview with my "culture vulture" colleague, Tyler Cowen:

<http://gazette.gmu.edu/articles/13544/>

Here's just one of the questions and answers:

Q: You also wrote about the globalization of culture in "Creative Destruction: How Globalization Is Changing the World's Cultures" (2002). Why did you conclude that cross-cultural trade is a good thing?

A. I think if we look at the products we enjoy — music, painting, sculptures or textiles — most of them are based in trade. Like my amate paintings, they're from Mexico. They can't sell that many to other Mexicans. So if they do it by selling to Americans, it's not that America overwhelms their culture, America helps them realize what they are. It's not like they like painting in an American style. It's like they found a new voice through trade. And the main point of my book is if you go through different examples, you find there's a more positive role for globalization than most people think. The typical

story is that with McDonald's everywhere, local culture disappears. There are McDonald's everywhere, but there's also plenty of ethnic food, niche food, new recipes and grandmas who cook for profit.

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2 May 2009

Editor, The New York Times
620 Eighth Avenue
New York, NY 10018

To the Editor:

Paul Krugman makes the astonishing claim that "a commitment to greenhouse gas reduction would, in the short-to-medium run, have the same economic effects as a major technological innovation: It would give businesses a reason to invest in new equipment and facilities even in the face of excess capacity" ("An Affordable Salvation," May 1).

Technological innovations benefit society NOT by giving firms "a reason to invest in new equipment and facilities," but rather by reducing costs - not by making resources scarcer (by artificially increasing demands for them) but by making resources go farther in their capacity to satisfy human desires.

If "a reason to invest" were sufficient to promote economic vigor, then war and natural disasters would do the trick even better than would government restrictions on greenhouse-gas emissions.

1 May 2009

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

To the Editor:

C. T. Sciance doesn't like immigrants competing for jobs in America (Letters, May 1). He tells of his brother "whose job driving trucks in California used to pay \$40 per hour and is now done by \$15-per-hour illegal immigrants with fake papers and stolen identities." I've some questions.

What's the relevance of the immigrants' legal status? Would Mr. Sciance have not complained if these immigrants were legal?

Second, does Mr. Sciance oppose the development of engines with more horsepower, rigs with improved braking and suspension systems, better highways that permit safer travel at higher speeds, or other technological advances that enable trucking companies today to ship any given amount of freight using fewer and fewer drivers? If not, why not? Why might he oppose one method of reducing shipping costs but not other methods?

29 April 2009

Editor, Los Angeles Times

Dear Editor:

Explaining the photo-op of his company jet flying low over Manhattan, President Obama said "It was something we found out about along with all of you" ("Obama calls plane's Manhattan photo-op 'a mistake'," April 28).

Who's the "we"? Surely not the royal "we," for no tribune of the people such as Mr. Obama would be so arrogant.

So by "we," Mr. Obama must mean himself and his administration - which raises the obvious question: if he and his aides can't keep track of a jumbo piece of capital equipment assigned to them for their own direct use, why should we trust them to keep track of the \$3.6 trillion dollars that they plan to spend in fiscal 2010 through a sprawling bureaucracy? When untold amounts of this money are misspent, as is inevitable, will Mr. Obama find out about it only when we do?

28 April 2009

TO: Whoever Is
Responsible for
www.ssotu.com

27 April 2009

Editor, Washington Post

FROM: Don Boudreaux

Dear Editor:

RE: your e-mail, and
associated link, sent to me
here in the United States
asserting that globalization
is "de-industrializing"
America

I'll ignore the river of factual
errors, misleading
definitions, and theoretical
misunderstandings that
saturate your 'analysis.' I
content myself merely ask
how you - who so
ferociously oppose
globalization and low-cost
foreign suppliers - justify
yourself exporting, to
America, your advice
(free!) and your website
(also free!) from your home
in Australia?

No one can doubt the
goodness of E.J. Dionne's
motives, but his
unshakable faith that well-
intentioned and intelligent
politicians will make
America better is
adolescent. The naive
confidence that he has in
Barack Obama - as
revealed in Mr. Dionne's
suggestion that the
President "is smart enough
to fix things" ("Ironies of 'a
Devout Non-Ideologue',"
April 27) - reminds me of a
line from George Eliot's
Middlemarch: "You go
against rottenness, and
there is nothing more
thoroughly rotten than
making people believe that
society can be cured by a
political hocus-pocus."
[George Eliot, Middlemarch
(Oxford Library Classics,
1996 [1871]), p. 517]