



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

Donald J. Boudreaux
Chairman, Department of Economics
George Mason University

dboudrea@gmu.edu
<http://www.cafehayek.com>

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.

22 July 2011

Editor, Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

Jeff Jacoby earns loud, long, and loving applause for his continuing efforts to debunk the groundless myth – one pregnant with totalitarian risks to individuals' reproductive choices – that the earth is over-populated ("Population boon," July 21). To see just how groundless is this myth, consider that, if every one of the earth's current 6.9 billion human inhabitants were to live beside each other in the same density that modern-day Parisians live beside each other, the

entire human population would fit comfortably within the confines of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi [<http://persquaremile.com/2011/01/18/if-the-worlds-population-lived-in-one-city/>] - a small fraction of the earth's temperate-zone landmass.

In light of the fact that the most creative and versatile resource (by far) is the human mind, world population today truly is not too great but, rather, too small. Far too small.

22 July 2011

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

Dear Editor:

It's unspeakably sad that thousands of Somalis are today starving to death ("U.N.: Famine in Somalia is killing tens of thousands," July 22). And it's true that a proximate cause of this starvation is drought. But blaming such starvation on weather conditions is bad social science; it is to confuse a proximate cause for a deeper cause - and a deeper cause that is avoidable through better policies.

The earth is full of people (such as residents the American southwest) who live in places that receive very little rainfall, or that

endure prolonged droughts, yet who aren't remotely at risk of starving. Understanding the starvation in Somalia requires an explanation of why Somalis enjoy no ready access, such as we have in America, to global supplies of food. (There is, after all, no global drought.) Such understanding demands also an explanation of why Somalis - unlike, say, farmers in rainfall-poor parts of California - don't use artificial irrigation and other modern techniques to ensure against drought and to increase crop yields.

Reasonable people can disagree over the reasons Somalia's economy prevents Somalis from escaping subsistence living conditions. But explaining today's starvation in Somalia as being the result of drought is as helpful as, say, explaining growing world population being the result of sex. Deeper thinking is needed.

20 July 2011

Editor, The Morning Call
Allentown, PA

Dear Editor:

Praising Sen. Bob Casey's opposition to freer trade, Nancy Tate regurgitates in

one letter the entire smorgasbord of noxious protectionist gruel swallowed today by many "Progressives" (Letters, July 19). Among Ms. Tate's projectiles, for example, is her assertion that free trade is "an assault" on "consumer rights."

How, exactly, are consumers' rights assaulted by a policy that gives them greater freedom to spend their money as they choose? In what ways are consumers harmed when the range, variety, and quality of goods and services available to them expand while the prices of those goods and services fall?

As trade scholar Dan Griswold wrote in his book *Mad About Trade*, "If one of our children grows up to invent a way to move goods and bits of information even more rapidly around the world, we rightly call that 'progress'; if another child grows up to become a populist politician who advocates raising trade barriers to slow the movement of those same goods and data across borders, we perversely call that 'progressive.'" [Daniel Griswold, *Mad About Trade*

(Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2009), p. 172]

19 July 2011

Mr. Mark E_____:

Dear Mr. E_____:

I normally ignore people who describe me (as you so charmingly do) as "a sh**eating lackey for the Koch brothers." But the confused thinking running throughout your e-mail is so interesting that I'll break my rule.

You wonder how I can "sleep nights carrying water for Corporate America." Why do I not, you ask, spend my energies "for example exposing McDonald's greedy refusal to stop serving nasty killer foods"? In your very next sentence you ask how I "can stand by idly while corporations manipulate customers needs and demands with advertising and marketing budgets bigger than [presumably the government budgets of] most African countries."

Question: if corporations can so easily "manipulate customers needs and demands with advertising and marketing," why doesn't McDonald's simply serve raw celery? Celery

being much less costly for McDonald's to buy than ground beef and chicken patties, a raw-celery-only menu at McDonald's would slash that company's costs. And with its nefarious facility to use "advertising and marketing" to hypnotize consumers into buying whatever it peddles (even "nasty killer foods!"), that fast-food behemoth will keep consumers spending as much on McDonald's raw celery as consumers now spend on Happy Meals and Egg McMuffins. McDonald's profits will zoom upward!

Because you're correct that, like all private corporations, McDonald's is "never satisfied with lower profits when [it] can snatch higher profits," I do wonder why the raw-celery-only menu option has never occurred to the moguls at McDonald's. Perhaps you can help me figure out why.