



**Comment on the Commentary of the Day**

by

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

[dboudrea@gmu.edu](mailto: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.**

---

27 November 2011

Editor, New York Post

Dear Editor:

Annie Karni's analysis of the neckwear worn by GOP presidential hopefuls during televised debates highlights the absurdity of the claim that democracy promotes reasoned, collective discussion of important issues - and, hence, it rightly (if unintentionally) exposes as laughable the suggestion that candidates' utterances during these debates deserve serious attention ("GOP's 'tie' game," Nov. 27).

The great economist Frank Knight in 1944 wrote words

that are wise, if unwelcome to democracy's dewy-eyed devotees: "Genuine, purely intellectual discussion is rare in modern society, even in intellectual and academic circles, and is approximated only in very small and essentially casual groups. On the larger scale, what passes for discussion is mostly argumentation or debate. The intellectual interest is largely subordinate to entertainment, i.e., entertaining and being entertained, or the immediate interest of the active parties centers chiefly in dominance, victory, instructing others, or persuading rather than convincing, and not in the impartial quest of truth." [Frank H. Knight, "The

Planful Act: The Possibilities and Limitations of Collective Rationality," in Knight, Freedom and Reform (New York: Harper & Bros., 1947), p. 349]

A night manager at Wal-Mart competing with his counterpart at the nearby Target is far more likely to speak substantively and sincerely than is anyone vain enough to fancy that he or she is fit to exercise the powers that are today vested in the President of the United States.

---

27 November 2011

Editor, The New York Times  
620 Eighth Avenue

New York, NY 10018

Dear Editor:

Like too many western aid experts, Samuel Loewenberg misses the fundamental reason famines still ravage developing countries ("The Famine Next Time," Nov. 27).

The reason isn't drought. Yuma, Arizona, gets vanishingly little rainfall, yet denizens of that city aren't ever threatened with starvation.

Nor is the reason a lack of Well-Researched Plans designed and implemented by Smart and Caring Experts. Yuma is amply supplied with food NOT through the efforts of intrepid bureaucrats but, instead, through the profit-seeking of restaurants such as McDonalds, retailers such as Wal-Mart, distributors such as Sysco, processors such as Kraft, and thousands of farmers and ranchers - each helped by additional thousands of producers of machinery, fertilizers, packaging materials, and the like - all responding to market prices.

Nor is the reason even the inadequacy of roads: that inadequacy is a

consequence of what ails Africa, not a cause.

The bouts of famine that still haunt Africa were routine throughout history and the globe. These were ended only when, only where, and only to the extent that bourgeois culture and its adornments - chiefly, reasonably free entrepreneurial markets - flourished. To recognize this fact is to rob western busybodies of sexy agendas; but it is also to point the only way toward real prosperity for Africans.

26 November 2011

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

Dear Editor:

Only by implicitly assuming that consumers are automata who mindlessly flood into retail stores the moment doors open for business can Robert Frank conclude that pre-dawn holiday retail-store openings are the result of a competitive struggle that ultimately harms everyone ("How to End the Black Friday Madness," Nov. 24). But consumers are not the passive fools that Prof. Frank presumes them to be. They have preferences

– on which they can act – regarding the hours at which they shop. If enough consumers want to sleep in without losing ready access to all of This Season's Must-Have Holiday Gifts, one or more retailers will have incentive and ability to cater to these consumers.

Such retailers can advertise "We stock a huge inventory of all the holiday gifts you want AND we never open earlier than 10am!" Problem solved. Late-sleeping shoppers will then be assured they can awaken at a respectable hour before trundling down to shop at such retailers.

Want evidence? Consider the fact that the vast majority of retailers, even during the holidays, in fact do not open before sunrise.

Prof. Frank has long been consumed by his vision of market competition as a negative-sum game. He here carelessly allows his bias to be confirmed by evidence of nothing more than SOME retailers' successfully catering to SOME consumers' preferences for the excitement of pre-dawn holiday shopping.