



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.

23 June 2012

Mr. G _____

Dear Mr.
G _____:

Skeptical of my economic case for more open immigration, [\[http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/immigrant-labor-helps-article-1.1098733\]](http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/immigrant-labor-helps-article-1.1098733)

you write that "The best conservatives understand what libertarians don't. Culture is more critical than economics."

While I'm unsure how to compare the importance of culture to that of economics, I do agree that culture matters – which is

one reason why it's important to offer principled arguments in support of freedom of movement and of association, both of which are violated by immigration restrictions. Acquiescence in such restrictions further erodes our culture of openness and of liberty.

More specifically, conservatives (which you obviously are; I do not say as a criticism) proudly champion family values. As such, conservatives especially should welcome immigrants to America – each one of whom, on average, sends annually to his or her family back home roughly \$1,600. [In

Feb. 2011 the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics estimated that, in 2010, the number of legal foreign residents in the U.S. was 21.2 million while the number of unauthorized immigrants living here was 10.8 million:

http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_ill_pe_2010.pdf

Thus, the total number of immigrants living in the U.S. in 2010 was approximately 32 million. 32 million divided into \$51.6 billion (the dollar value of remittances sent that year from the U.S.) yields a figure of just over \$1,600.] (These

"remittances, totaling in 2010 \$51.6 billion, are about 25 percent larger than Uncle Sam's foreign-aid budget.) People who care so deeply for their families – and who, contrary to myth, come to America overwhelmingly to work – surely should be applauded for dedication rather than apprehended for deportation.

21 June 2012

Editor, The Wall Street Journal
1211 6th Ave.
New York, NY 10036

Dear Editor:

Seeking fewer restrictions on the immigration of high-skilled workers, Matthew Slaughter explains how the Employ American Workers Act (part of Pres. Obama's 'stimulus' legislation) - by restricting the hiring of high-skilled immigrants - results in "Lost ideas. Lost jobs. Lost taxes" ("How Skilled Immigrants Create Jobs," June 21).

Indeed. But the same is likely true for restrictions on low-skilled immigrants. By changing patterns of worker specialization, more low-skilled immigrants - like more high-skilled ones - can promote productivity improvements.

Consider, for example, Northwestern University economist Joseph Ferrie's finding that "the transformation of manufacturing from manual to mechanical methods occurred most rapidly in [geographic] areas where a large unskilled labor force suddenly became available in the 1840s and early 1850s." [A Historical Perspective on High-Skilled Immigrants to the United States, 1820-1920," in Barry R. Chiswick, ed., High-Skilled Immigration in a Global Labor Market (Washington: AEI Press, 2011), p. 37] An influx of low-skilled workers promoted a high-tech outcome that, in turn, helped fuel America's economic growth. There's no reason why similar outcomes wouldn't occur today.

More generally, suppose that the typical high-skilled immigrant will annually enlarge America's economic pie, on net, by \$100,000, and that the typical low-skilled immigrant will enlarge this pie by only \$20,000. If it's foolish to deny ourselves the benefit that the typical high-skilled immigrant can bring, surely it's equally foolish to deny ourselves the benefit that five typical

low-skilled immigrants can bring.

21 June 2012

Editor, The Wall Street Journal
1211 6th Ave.
New York, NY 10036

Dear Editor:

Bravo for Bjorn Lomborg's plea for western elites to put their pet environmental concerns in proper context ("Feel-Good Environmentalism at the U.N.," June 21). As he notes, today's most lethal pollutants aren't industrial greenhouse gases but, rather, pre-industrial dangers - still prominent in developing countries - like "inhaling smoke from inefficient and dirty fuels such as dried animal dung, crop residues and wood." We in the developed world have cleansed our environment of these most lethal pollutants by relying upon the very 'non-green' technologies that chic environmentalists, ignorant of history, portray as unprecedentedly horrific sources of pollution.

Indeed, industrial capitalism is history's greatest ANTI-pollutant. Asphalt and automobiles, for example, combine to cleanse our cities and

towns of the bacteria and insects (and stench) that are inseparable from animal-powered transportation. The petroleum used to make asphalt and to power automobiles is used also to make plastic wraps that keep our foods unpolluted, and to produce pharmaceuticals that keep our bodies cleaner and healthier.

To list all of the ways that industrial capitalism depollutes our environment requires several volumes. Yet we need only look around our homes for compelling evidence - evidence in the form of the solid (i.e., non-thatched) roofs above our heads and solid (i.e., non-dirt) floors beneath our feet; potable water running from faucets; indoor plumbing; antibacterial ointments and antibiotics; refrigerators and freezers and laundry detergents and automatic washing machines and vacuum cleaners and light bulbs and gas cooktops and electric heat-pumps.... The list of ways in which the developed world has been cleaned by capitalism is practically endless.