



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.

12 February 2012

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

Dear Editor:

Many of my friends wonder why I'm annoyed by Michelle Obama's constant mother-henning insistence that Americans eat more veggies. "She's just encouraging people to voluntarily make healthier choices," my mystified friends tell me.

Part of my reaction is a matter of taste: I simply dislike preachy people trying to save others from evils du jour. But part of

my reaction springs from the contradiction between Ms. Obama's preaching and Mr. Obama's legislating.

Obamacare prohibits insurers from applying exclusions based on a patient's pre-existing conditions. People choosing unhealthy diets, therefore, no longer have to worry that their choices will reduce their access to health insurance. This legislation thus removes an incentive - one supplied by market forces - for people to make healthier choices.

So on one hand we have Ms. Obama using smiles and words to encourage Americans to eat healthier

foods, while Mr. Obama uses other people's money to pay Americans to ignore his wife's advice.

Wanna guess which of these Obamas will have the greatest effect on people's actual diets?

11 February 2012

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

Dear Editor:

You think it's heartening and good that, as you report, "Michelle Obama is on the road, campaigning and telling Americans to eat their vegetables" ("Helpings of Energy and Cheer for the Trail," Feb. 11).

I think it's creepy and obnoxious.

Who the hell is she to tell - or even to advise - people outside of her own family what to eat? Free and responsible men and women do not take seriously those who use their fame as a platform to issue advice about matters on which they know nothing - and politicians' spouses (no less than politicians themselves, Hollywood entertainers, sports stars, and the like) have zero knowledge about each individual American's dietary tastes and preferences. And we are downright repulsed by the media's habit of mistaking a person's celebrity for expertise,

popularity for acumen, and visibility for enlightenment.

Prof. Krugman:

You boast that you would be even more "mean" than the admittedly mean Jonathan Chait when ridiculing those with whom you disagree. [\[http://krugman.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/09/jonathan-chait-is-mean/\]](http://krugman.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/09/jonathan-chait-is-mean/) You justify your self-license to be mean by asserting that nearly everyone who publicly stakes out positions contrary to your (and Chait's) "Progressive" positions 'deliberately' "keeps putting out the old discredited arguments, again and again."

The lead piece of allegedly discredited evidence that you report as being offered by the "hacks" who disagree with you is that (in your words) "Inequality hasn't really increased, despite the IRS data."

First, you ignore important questions regarding the weight that INCOME inequality should have relative to other forms of inequality – such as inequality of treatment before the law, inequality of consumption opportunities, inequality of leisure time, inequality of risk-taking, and inequality of work-

effort. And you take for granted that income inequality is indeed not only unambiguously a problem, but a problem whose correction unambiguously justifies granting more power to the state.

Perhaps you're correct. But questions asked to challenge your perspective on the sources of – and on the policy significance of – inequality of incomes are hardly as trite and contemptible as you presume them to be.

Second, you must be aware that the data on this issue are not so clear and unequivocal as to justify outright meanness and contempt toward those who disagree with your interpretation that income inequality is increasing so much as to warrant the concern that you give to it.

You mention data from the IRS. Fine. But what about recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau?

[\[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-a1j7rAL0ITM/TqLWvFV912I/AAAAAAAAAP5Q/CxUhoL6Zk0w/s1600/income.jpg\]](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-a1j7rAL0ITM/TqLWvFV912I/AAAAAAAAAP5Q/CxUhoL6Zk0w/s1600/income.jpg)

These data show, for example, that the average household in the top income quintile in 2010 housed 4.25 more people than did the average

household in the bottom income quintile. These data also show that the overwhelming bulk of top-quintile households are headed by married couples while the overwhelming bulk of bottom-quintile households are headed by single adults. And they show that three-quarters of top-income households are headed by people in their prime earning years while only 44 percent of bottom-income households are so headed.

Do these facts (and others too numerous to list here) - especially in light of changing demographics such as increased immigration of low-skilled workers and higher divorce rates - not cause you to pause before accusing those who disagree with you of being "hacks" who (you assert) argue in bad faith and, hence, deserve only your vitriol?

8 February 2012

Ms. Elaine Marshall:

Dear Ms. Marshall:

I have no idea how I wound up on your e-mail list, but given that I'm there I take the privilege of responding to your e-mail of this morning in which you write that "Millions of women and

grassroots activists expressed their outrage last week at Susan G. Komen Foundation's decision to stop funding breast cancer screenings at Planned Parenthood. And, thanks to their inspiring efforts, the Komen Foundation backed down."

To me, nothing about those efforts are "inspiring." Quite the opposite.

The Susan G. Komen Foundation is a private organization whose 'controversial' decision is well within the bounds of legitimacy. That Foundation's officers - as opposed to you and the "millions of women and grassroots activists" - have the keenest insight into how its spending decisions affect its ultimate goal of finding a cure for breast cancer. How do you and the "activists" you applaud know that the Komen Foundation's goal would not have been better promoted had the Foundation reallocated its funds away from Planned Parenthood and toward some other recipient? What wizardry transforms your "outrage" into insight about how the Komen Foundation's grant-making decisions affect its fund-raising prospects?

That you presume to know better than the Komen Foundation how its privately raised funds are best spent to achieve its admirable goal reveals only your and the "activists'" insolence and utterly unmerited sense of self-importance.

Why don't you practice minding your own business?