



## Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

Donald J. Boudreaux

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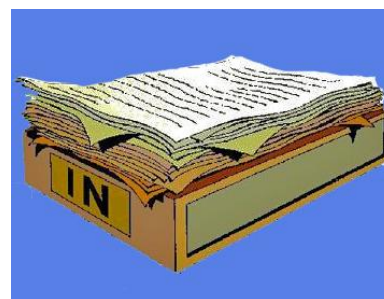
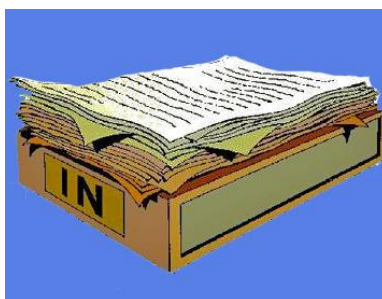
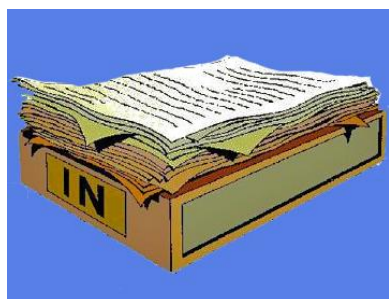
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**Disclaimer: The following "Letters to the Editor" were sent to the respective publications on the dates indicated. Some were printed, but many were not. The original articles that are being commented on may or may not be available on the internet, and if they are, they may require registration or subscription to access. Some of the articles being commented on are syndicated, therefore, they may also have appeared in other publications.**

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18 August 2013

Editor, Investvine

Dear Editor:

Regarding your report on the U.S. International Trade Commission's decision to punitively tax Americans who buy shrimp from certain foreign countries ("US plans to raise shrimp import taxes," August 18): let's describe this decision as what it is, namely, government-orchestrated theft.

If American shrimpers waved guns in consumers' faces and threatened to shoot if these consumers insist on buying low-priced imported shrimp rather than buy higher-price domestic shrimp, such thievery would be punished with jail time. Fortunately for American shrimpers and many other domestic producers, they need not themselves engage in such distasteful and risky activities. Uncle Sam does it for them.

Bureaucrats in Washington - at the behest of domestic producers - threaten force against consumers who would continue to buy low-priced imports rather than pay the higher prices demanded by domestic producers. Just as if the domestic producers themselves wielded the guns, when government does so consumers are forced to hand over money against their will to these producers in exchange for nothing other than not being roughed up, held captive, or killed.

Calling government's supply of such thieving services "trade policy" doesn't alter the essence of what's going on: theft carried out with threats of violence.

Sincerely,

Donald J. Boudreaux

Professor of Economics

and

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20 August 2013

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

Dear Editor:

Eugene Robinson condemns racial profiling to fight crime ("Positive steps on 'stop and frisk,' drug arrests," August 20), yet he applauds racial profiling to encourage minority enrollment in colleges ("Supreme Court caution on affirmative action," June 25).

Government efforts to fight crime aren't identical to government efforts to promote education. But the burden - and it's a heavy one - should be on those people, such as Mr. Robinson, who propose racial profiling for some government activities but who oppose racial profiling for other government activities. Why do the angels that allegedly inspire officials on some occasions to judge people benevolently by the color of their skin flee to be replaced by the devils - or, at least, by the ordinary run of human imperfections and biases - that prompt officials on other occasions to judge people maliciously by the color of their skin?

Sincerely,  
Donald J. Boudreaux  
Professor of Economics  
and  
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22 August 2013

Programming Director, WTOP Radio  
Washington, DC

Dear Sir or Madam:

You report that "A new Economist poll finds that a majority of Americans yearn for the bubble gum days of the 1950s" ("Which era do you prefer? Poll finds Americans long for the 1950s").

It's hard to believe that these poll results reveal people's informed preferences. Rather, these results likely reflect nostalgia mixed with misinformation spread by a barrage of news 'reports' on the allegedly stagnant - or even deteriorating - economic fortunes of

middle-class Americans.

I challenge you and other Americans to do what I did and lay your hands on a Sears catalog from the 1950s. My catalog - bought recently on eBay (a company founded in 1995) - is from 1956. Peruse the catalog. What do you see? You see, for example, Sears's cheapest TV (black'n'white, of course), priced so that a typical full-time manufacturing worker in 1956 had to toil 61 hours to earn enough money to buy that TV. Today, the typical American worker can buy an infinitely superior TV with only ten hours of work. And what's true for TVs is true for nearly everything else that Sears sells: clothing, kitchen appliances, automobile parts, office furniture, sporting goods, children's toys. The list is long.\*

An even longer list can be made of what you DON'T see in that catalog or in any other record of the economy's offerings to Americans in the 1950s: no digital cameras; no lightweight waterproof sportswear; no microwave ovens; no CDs, DVDs, or MP3 players; no personal computers; no cellphones; no GPS devices; no indexed mutual funds; no soft contact lenses; no statins; no measles or meningitis vaccines; no portable defibrillators; no oral contraception; no MRI machines. Commercial jet travel did arrive in 1958 - but at fares well beyond the reach of most Americans.

While today is far from perfect, I'll bet my defined-contribution pension that any American - even any white, male, Christian, heterosexual American - transported from today into the 1950s would struggle to get back to the future with a fervor that would embarrass the 1985 movie character Marty McFly.

Sincerely,

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26 August 2013

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*

1211 6th Ave.

New York, NY 10036

Dear Editor:

You worry that, if approved as Chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Ron Binz will expand that agency's reach well beyond its narrow mandate by conscripting it to fight "the climate wars" ("The Friends of Ron Binz," August 26).

Your concern is justified. As H.L. Mencken observed 80 years ago, "The bureaucrat begins, perhaps, by doing only what he conceives to be his sworn duty, but unless there are very efficient four-wheel brakes upon him he soon adds a multitude of inventions of his own, all of them born of his professional virtuosity and designed to lather and caress his sense of power."\*

Sincerely,  
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30 August 2013

Programming Director, WTOP Radio  
Washington, DC

Dear Sir or Madam:

Last night and this morning your news anchors introduced your report on D.C. Mayor Vincent Gray's ambivalence toward the pending "living-wage" bill with this question: "Will the District force large retailers to pay their workers more?"

A more illuminating introduction would be "Will the District force low-skilled workers to demand wages that make many of these workers unprofitable to employ?"

Sincerely,  
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