



## Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

Donald J. Boudreaux  
Chairman, Department of Economics  
George Mason University  
dboudrea@gmu.edu

**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.**

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16 April 2006

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

Dear Editor:

Reviewing Stephen Kinzer's Overthrow, Julia Sweig recounts how white plantation owners in 19th-century Hawaii supported Uncle Sam's overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani in order to "get in on a lucrative but protected mainland sugar market" ("The Meddlesome Uncle Sam," April 16). Ms. Sweig then asks rhetorically "Ever wonder why free trade has such a bad name?"

What has free trade to do with this event? By Ms. Sweig's own admission, the U.S. sugar market was protected. Such protection, not coincidentally, was found by economists Alan Dye and Richard Sicotte (Alan Dye and Richard Sicotte, "The U.S. Sugar Program and the Cuban Revolution," Journal of Economic History, Vol. 64, September 2004, pp. 673-704) to have contributed significantly to

the success of Castro's communist revolution in Cuba.

The question as I ask it is not rhetorical: "Why DOES free trade have such a bad name?"

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15 April 2006

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

Dear Editor:

Thomas Sowell asks rhetorically, "If more immigrants are a good thing, where do we stop - and why? Why not fling the doors open to all the people who want to immigrate here from Haiti or Cuba or anywhere else?" ("...and 'solutions': Part IV," April 15).

Indeed, why not? America had an open-door policy until the 1920s. Economists Cecil Bohanon and T. Norman Van Cott (<http://web.bsu.edu/cob/econ/research/papers/bohanon2005ir.pdf>) find that this open immigration contributed mightily to America's impressive economic growth during the 19th century. Because

immigrants then were a larger proportion of the U.S. population than they are today - and because there was then less social and economic infrastructure per capita than there is today

(<http://www.fee.org/publications/the-freeman/article.asp?aid=4206>) - it's implausible that more open immigration today will damage America's economy.

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14 April 2006

Editor, USA Today

Dear Editor:

Clay Bennett's April 14th cartoon showing the economy's eggs all in one basket - a basket containing also a grenade labeled "Debt" - is ironic. Uncle Sam's reckless fiscal policies do indeed burden Americans with excessive debt. But because we're globalized, our economic eggs are not in one basket.

Globalization means that American producers aren't dependent upon one country or region for supplies and customers, and that American consumers aren't dependent upon

only American producers for goods and services. And America's capital-account surplus means that savings and investment flow into our economy from around the world. The only way America's economic eggs will be put into one basket is if we follow the foolish advice of those who would make us more insular by choking off immigration and by restricting our ability to buy goods and services from abroad.

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13 April 2006

Editor, USA Today

Dear Editor:

Laura Vanderkam is correct: tax withholding makes citizens less sensitive to the amount of their earnings confiscated by government ("Withholding feeds tax apathy," April 13). It's no coincidence that 1943 was both the first year that Uncle Sam collected income taxes through withholding AND the first year that Americans earning no more than average wages were required to pay federal income taxes.

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12 April 2006

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

Dear Editor:

You report that "the administration

has taken a get-tough approach with China, the country with the biggest trade gap with the United States" ("U.S. Trade Deficit Improves in February," April 12).

Because there's absolutely no reason to suppose that any two countries will sell to each other the same amounts that they buy from each other, concerns about a U.S. trade deficit with a single country are especially harebrained - about as harebrained as I would be if I fretted about my trade deficit with the Washington Post. After all, because I have a paid subscription to your paper but you buy nothing from me, I run a trade deficit with you. Unlike the administration, however, I have no plans to punish myself because of this situation.

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11 April 2006

The Editor, New York Times  
229 West 43rd St.  
New York, NY 10036

To the Editor:

We Americans continually boast of our commitment to liberty. But I question the depth of this commitment when I read the likes of Nicholas Kristof calling on government to regulate and tax us in ways designed "to change Americans' diet and exercise habits."

How can anyone claim to love liberty and, at the same time,

believe that the state should control what people eat and how they exercise?

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10 April 2006

The Editor, New York Times  
229 West 43rd St.  
New York, NY 10036

To the Editor:

I can overlook many of the weaknesses marring Nicholas Kristof's case for keeping Mexican workers out of America ("Compassion that Hurts," April 9) - such as, for example, his mistaken claim that the Borjas-Katz paper is "the most careful study" of the effect of immigration on wages in America. (Economists Gianmarco Ottaviano and Giovanni Peri sort the data more carefully and find that, between 1980 and 2000, immigration reduced the wages of the least-educated Americans not by 8.2 percent but by less than one percent.)

But I cannot overlook Kristof's willingness to deny millions of desperately poor Mexicans the opportunity of making better lives for themselves in the United States. What moral theory concludes that people born south of the Rio Grande are less worthy than are people born north of that river?