



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

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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 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.

20 August 2006

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

To the Editor:

Jonathan Ceniceroy writes of Rochas clothing-designer Olivier Theyskens that his "somewhat worried and tortured gaze is emblematic of all those who envision and create fine art amid the behemoth of the corporate complex" (Letters, August 20). Boo hoo.

Rochas' corporate owners - first Wella, and then Procter & Gamble - enabled Mr. Theyskens for the past five years to enjoy

substantial financial backing for his designs. Unfortunately, Mr. Theyskens' design group has consistently lost money. Does Mr. Ceniceroy believe that P&G should keep Rochas afloat simply to let Mr. Theyskens "follow, completely, his muse"? More generally, would P&G be a better corporate citizen if it kept subsidizing a money-losing clothing line that is affordable only by the hyper-rich?

19 August 2006

Editor, Harper's Magazine
666 Broadway
New York, NY 10012

Dear Editor:

While a handful of firms profit from war, Lewis Lapham's suggestion that war generally is good for capitalism is wildly mistaken ("Lionhearts," September 2006).

Whether war is justified or not, it enhances government's ability to confiscate private property - it devours human and non-human resources, raising the cost of labor and materials - it increases the likelihood of wage and price controls - it tempts governments to debase currencies - it lures governments to raise taxes - it spawns embargoes which cut firms off from customers and suppliers - it multiplies the chances that factories, offices, inventories, infrastructure,

and supply facilities will be destroyed. At the very least, it makes the future frighteningly uncertain. For these and other reasons, war is anathema to industry and commerce.

Understanding that the capitalist ethos differs greatly from the martial ethos, Napoleon contemptuously dismissed capitalist England as "a nation of shopkeepers." His understanding of capitalism was more profound than Mr. Lapham's - even if Napoleon's estimation of the full consequences of this difference in ethos proved to be far off the mark.

18 August 2006

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

To the Editor:

Paul Krugman says that the years spanning the Great Depression and World War II mark "the birth of middle-class America" ("Wages, Wealth, and Prosperity," August 18). This claim is fantastically mistaken. Even a quick perusal of the history literature (For example, Daniel Boorstin's *The Americans: The*

Democratic Experience) shows ordinary Americans in the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries enjoying ever-greater access to such bourgeois amenities as indoor plumbing, electricity, telephony, varied diets, formal schooling, and more leisure.

And the major American businesses founded during this era - firms such as Sears & Roebuck, Montgomery Ward, F.W. Woolworth, Standard Oil, Borden's, Hershey's, Swift & Co., Coca-Cola, Ford Motor Co. - succeeded not by catering to the denizens of Park Avenue but, rather, to increasingly prosperous middle America.

17 August 2006

Editor, The Boston Globe

Dear Editor:

Mark LeVine ignores relevant facts in his argument that the Israeli-Hezbollah war proves that "globalization isn't working" ("Why globalization isn't working," August 17).

First, no serious thinker in the past century has claimed that freer trade is sufficient to ensure peace. More importantly, economies of

middle-eastern countries, including Israel, aren't particularly free. This dearth of economic freedom strips citizens of these countries of much economic opportunity. Finally, Mr. LeVine is wrong to suggest that globalization increases income inequality. An important paper (<http://papers.nber.org/papers/w8904>) by Columbia University economist Xavier Sala-i-Martin shows that global inequality has fallen since the 1970s - that is, as globalization has intensified.

16 August 2006

Editor, The Wall Street Journal
200 Liberty Street
New York, NY 10281

Dear Editor:

Robert Steinberg supports raising the minimum wage because, in his experience as a small-business owner, his costs rose unnecessarily when he "lost an employee and had to train a new employee. Any person hired at \$5.15 an hour is not apt to stay very long. The employee that earns more than the minimum wage will stay longer and be more productive" (Letters, August 16).

No doubt. But as Mr. Steinberg's own comments reveal, when paying workers more than \$5.15 per hour improves employers' bottom lines, employers have incentives to pay these higher wages. Surely profit-seeking firms need not await a diktat from government before taking steps to raise profits.

The Relative Meaning of 'Poor'
Tuesday, August 15, 2006;
Page A12
Washington Post
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/14/AR2006081401119.html>

To read Brigid Schulte's recent "Class Questions" article about American poverty [The Magazine, Aug. 6], one might think we are going to hell in a handbasket. Not so.

Although concern about poverty is no doubt well-intentioned, it would be more fitting to focus on international poverty, or at least to point out that even the poorest Americans are rich by foreign standards. While "poor" Americans may not seem to have an enviable lot, even poor Americans still have access to goods such as telephones, TVs, cars and computers. These goods were luxuries or nonexistent in America only a couple of generations ago and remain inaccessible to the overwhelming majority of the world's citizens. Even America's poor are rich. The Post would do well to point out how well off America is, despite the challenges we face.

Daniel Lurker

Fairfax
(Guest Contributor & GMU
Economics Student)

15 August 2006

Editor, The Wall Street
Journal
200 Liberty Street
New York, NY 10281

Dear Editor:

Herman Soifer is upset at the extra costs Americans pay to intern illegal Chinese immigrants who China refuses to take back (Letters, August 15). Putting aside the question of the true costs of these immigrants, Mr. Soifer's proposed solution - that we "enact selective duties on Chinese imports, whose magnitude would be in proportion to the burden China inflicts on us" - is thoroughly wrongheaded.

Duties on imports from China would only burden Americans further. Such duties raise the prices Americans must pay not only for goods imported from China but also for goods produced here and in other countries that compete with goods from China. The pain from an unpleasant punch in the nose is not relieved by a follow-up punch in the gut.

14 August 2006

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

Dear Editor:

Upset by the injuries
suffered by Redskins'
players in yesterday's
preseason game, Michael
Wilbon insists that these
games are pointless

("Game Doesn't Count, But
the Injuries Do," August
14). And he accuses the
NFL of greedy
irresponsibility for its
refusal to forego the extra
revenues that these games
generate.

Mr. Wilbon misses the
point of professional
football. It's entertainment
for fans, nothing more. If

fans willingly pay to attend
preseason games, and
willingly tune-in in large
numbers on television to
watch them, these games
aren't pointless. As the
NFL's substantial revenues
from these games prove,
preseason games please
fans enough, and please
enough fans, so that the
NFL is perfectly justified in
staging them.