

Blaming Progress for So-Called Inequality

The second article Dr. Steven Horwitz cites in this essay is yet one more time I wish I could go all Jesus-in-the-temple on those who not only complain about mankind's progress in improving how we live but blame progress for "increasing inequality." Laundromats are disappearing for the same way appliance repair shops mostly have, and photo services kiosks are extinct: people don't need them as much as a higher value use for the same area. It's, in fact, a good sign that a laundromat is torn down and replaced with housing, even expensive housing, because it shows people in the area (whether old-timers or newcomers) are as a whole getting wealthier. They aren't demanding laundromats as much as they are new housing.

The author of that article, though, doesn't seem to want anyone to be better off than anyone else. The same article sobs over the disappearance of "game rooms" and movie nights at colleges. Must it be stated what most anyone knows, that it's because so many students have their own game consoles, and it's so inexpensive to stream movies from the comfort of their rooms?

"That Kim thinks this is evidence of growing inequality shows that for some, perhaps many, on the left, fighting 'inequality' appears to be more important than conquering poverty." (Horwitz)

Indeed, simple history shows that the claim of "increasing inequality" is patently untrue. Inequality is, in fact, *decreasing*, yet because some are still without, there are those on the left who'd rather everyone go without. As I posted on Facebook just a couple of days ago, it's bad enough when liberals are Luddites, but it's far worse when they're anti-tech because not everyone can have it. If they had their way, never mind cell phones or flat-screen TVs: they'd have torn down the first hut that anyone built, demanding that it be available to all instead of just the few.

It's also simple history that as technology advances, its accessibility to the masses has always increased. Look at all mankind has achieved since the Industrial Revolution, and then in the 30 years since cell phones were something only for ultra-wealthy, how many millions of people in the Third World are considered "poor" but have cell phones! So not only does technology become more widely available as its level increases, but the rate at which it spreads is ever accelerating. Consider that it took perhaps *800 years* just for the Iron Age to spread from the Middle East to throughout Europe.

Something I mention from time to time is that people talk about "the good old days" when appliances were supposedly far more reliable. If they were, why were there so many businesses focused on appliance repair, and there are not so many now? Why was the

Maytag Man such a selling point if things then were made “better”? A scene early in “The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit” shows that the supposed Golden Age of the United States had plenty of money woes, with expensive household items continuing to cost money when they broke down. For comparison, TVs today are as cheap as they’ve ever been, even without adjusting for inflation, and though they aren’t as repairable, they tend to last longer such that many people figure it’s time to upgrade to a better one.

Once upon a time, a family would pay 10% or 20% of the initial price to keep the old box going. What’s more, a TV repair shop wasn’t necessarily the person in town who knew all the ins and outs of a TV, but the man with a comparative advantage in getting replacement vacuum tubes, and merely swapping them in, one by one, to see if a tube had burned out. The advent of integrated circuits improved reliability but was still nothing like today. How many today remember all the shops in the 1980s for people to bring not just TVs and VCRs, but computers as simple as Commodore and Atari computers, and especially disk drives? They had lots of business because a couple of Andrew Jacksons were cheaper than buying a new unit. My parents’ first VCR cost \$300 in 1983 and was nowhere near as nice, in aesthetics as well as capability, as a \$20 DVD player today, let alone a \$50 Blu-ray player.