

“Buying Local” Is as Senseless as “Buying Tall”

Written by Donald J. Boudreaux.

The argument that I make below against the economic case for “buying local” has almost certainly been made by others – perhaps, in some variety, even by me. So I here claim no originality. Still....

Many advocates of “buying local” insist that buying local is good for the local economy and, hence, economically good for each person in the local economy. For a number of reasons, the economics on which the “buy local” movement rests is remarkably weak. (Just as it is a sure sign that someone has no sound grasp of economics if he or she believes that protectionism is a source of national economic prosperity, an even surer sign that someone has no sound grasp of economics is that person’s belief that buying local is a source of local economic prosperity.)

What about “Buy tall!” Would tall people enrich themselves by buying only from each other?

So to everyone who believes that buying local enriches local people, I pose a question: Do you also believe that, say, “buying white” would enrich white people? According to the logic of “buying local,” buying white” should enrich white people no less than “buying local” is said to enrich local people. Other than occasionally saving on the cost of one input – namely, transportation – every argument made for “buying local” seems to apply to “buying white.” Keeping the money in the white community would ensure that this money doesn’t drain, or spill, out into other communities such as the black community, the Asian community, and the Hispanic community. Demand for white-made goods and services would be better ensured! And whites could take pride in helping each other to better secure a bright economic today and tomorrow for their white selves and their white children!

And what’s true for whites is true for other groups! “Buy black” will – if the logic of “buy local” is sound – enrich the black community. Blacks so enlightened as to understand the economic benefits for blacks of “buying black” must surely join with the sages in the Ku Klux Klan in regarding the economic integration of whites and blacks as an economic calamity rather than as a blessing.

So, too, of course for other ethnic groups! “Buy Asian!” “Buy Hispanic!” “Buy Native American!”

Alternatively, what about “Buy straight!” Would the economic fortunes of heterosexual people be raised if all heterosexuals successfully commit to engage in commerce only with

each other and not with those in the LGBT community? If “buy local” enthusiasts are correct, the answer seems to be ‘yes.’

And so, of course, “Buy gay!” “Buy lesbian!” “Buy bisexual!” and “Buy transgendered!” would also be sound guides to economic prosperity for these people.

Or, here’s yet another way to slice and dice the relevant community: What about “Buy tall!” Would tall people – say, all men more than 6 feet tall and all women more than 5’9” – enrich themselves by buying only from each other? Same question for short people.

Or what about “Buy T!” Would all people whose last names begin with the letter “T” enrich themselves economically if they trade only with each other and not with those whose last names begin with letters other than “T”?

I oughtn’t need to say so – but I will – that I find it to be both ethically repulsive and economically insane to endorse any such movement as “Buy white” or “Buy straight!” or “Buy T!” Most people (I suspect) naturally understand that a “Buy T” movement would make those “T”s who adhere to it poorer, not richer. Likewise with such absurdities as “Buy white” and “Buy straight” and “Buy tall!”

Yet insert the word “local” behind the word “Buy” and many people fall for the crazy notion that those who “Buy local” will make themselves and their local communities economically richer.

Nuts. No one should buy it.

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