

Productive Advances: Who Benefits Most?

by Joseph S. Fulda

The free enterprise system allows inventors and investors to reap the rewards of creativity and risk. But in a market economy, those who gain *most* from the productive advances thought of by inventors and funded by investors are the poor.

Let us examine several productive advances and see to whom the benefits accrue. Consider first the printing press. The very rich had scribes and private secretaries do their clerical work, but the very poor are now literate in numbers once deemed impossible. Or to move up the centuries, consider the television. The rich had hours of leisure and the funds for private entertainment to fill them. The poor, however, now have an entertainment cornucopia undreamt of in earlier ages. As a third example, consider air travel. The rich were able to afford weeks of travel by land or sea, while their properties continued to generate income. Those less well off, on the other hand, would never see distant lands or relations without air travel. Or consider antibiotics, one of the twentieth century's miracles. The rich who live in sanitary, spacious quarters have had less need of these wonder drugs than those who occupy crowded, unsanitary, slum areas. Finally, consider that mundane appliance, the vacuum cleaner. The rich often have others do their housekeeping. Their housekeepers, in contrast, have had their jobs simplified and their hourly output increased by the vacuum cleaner's invention.

From little things to big things, the principle holds. Productive advances help everyone, but most of all the less well-to-do.

This is hardly limited to inventions and dis-

coveries, but applies to improvements in productive methods as well. Who has been helped the most by specialization, mass production, automation, and robotics? The rich consumer could always afford the work of the skilled craftsman, but the poor shopper depends on the economies of modern technology and productive methods for the wide variety of household items from which he chooses. Likewise, advances in these productive methods may enrich the factory owner, but it is his workers whose jobs over the decades have become lighter, more meaningful, and better paid. Nor is this observation true only of blue collar workers. From the pencil to the typewriter to the electric typewriter to the word processor, the jobs of the lowest-paid, white-collar workers have also become lighter, more meaningful, and better paid.

Nor have all these advances thrust millions into idleness (although there is some temporary dislocation), as the doomsayers have warned. Rather, mankind's energies have been channeled more and more into the good things of life and less and less into its bare necessities.

Government with its power to tax has not been the cause of the remarkable improvement in our standard of living over the years. Only productive advances make the same physical effort count for more and more and only economic growth so arising can truly increase everyone's rewards. And when productivity is enhanced and the economy grows, it is the poor who are most lifted by the rising tide. □

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The Pursuit of Happiness

by William C. Dennis

The occasion of the anniversary of the Independence of the United States of America traditionally has called for a few words about our institutions of Liberty. My few words combine three themes: the settlement of the Rocky Mountain West—a theme appropriate to our location here at Big Sky, Montana; the idea of Liberty—the special interest of our sponsor; and the Declaration of Independence itself—in remembrance of this particular anniversary.

I choose to call this address: “The Pursuit of Happiness.” I think Jefferson intended to suggest by his now-famous phrase, that happiness, if it is to come at all, comes more through the pursuit than the acquisition. Whatever the scholarly debate on the meaning of this phrase may eventually conclude, Americans over the ages have acted rather practically on the implied suggestion of Jefferson that happiness comes from living an active life of freedom.

For most people, through most of human history, change was likely to bring personal hardship—holding on to the little one had was about all that could be expected—and even the *idea* of progress was inconceivable. But self-betterment was a real possibility in America, and the hope of personal improvement was one of the driving forces in American settlement. But it was not so much ease and comfort they

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sought, but opportunity. The restless mobility of Americans attests to the fact that material success by itself brought not happiness but boredom, and that too much security could be debilitating rather than liberating. Or at least so it once was; now times have changed. Perhaps we have lost some of the spirit of adventure in the pursuit of happiness once possessed by earlier generations.

I begin with a few stories of the westward movement. Let us look at *Journal of a Trapper*, by Osborne Russell. Russell was born in Bowdoinham, Maine in 1814 and died in Placer County, California, August 26, 1892. Maine was not yet a state at his birth and California was only an administrative province of the Spanish Empire. In April of 1834 Russell left Independence, Missouri, on what was to become a nine-year journey in the pursuit of happiness, heading for the Rocky Mountains as a fur trapper. Russell wandered all over the northern Rockies on incredible journeys of risk and daring.

Here, in his own words, is Russell’s description of his Fourth of July, 1835, in Jackson’s Hole in what now is Grand Teton National Park:

Here we again attempted to cross Lewis’ fork with a Bull skin boat July 4th Our boat being completed we loaded it with baggage and crossed to the other side but on returning we ran it into some brush when it instantly filled and sunk but without further accident than the loss of the boat we had already forded half the distance across the river upon horse back and were now upon a other shore. We now commenced making a raft of logs