

You Didn't Build That

When President Obama said to the entrepreneurs of the United States (and of the rest of the world), "You didn't build that," he meant that their achievements were not of their own making, that their accomplishments were the result of the society in which they live.

The President, and many others, is convinced that entrepreneurial genius is enabled, nurtured, born by the grace of the society in which it flourishes, and without that society the fruits of genius would not exist. "You didn't build that," means we all contributed to the effort made in order to achieve that. We are all equally responsible for the results of genius, and so we should all benefit equally from the fruits of it. Genius is not special. We all built the bridges, roads, trucks, buildings, infrastructure which enables genius to create, so we should all partake equally in the riches that flow from it. Genius is just another cog in the machine of society that is communally responsible for the fruits of all labor. Riches may flow to a creator as a result of his invention, but they are not rightfully his. They are ours, and we can justly take from him our fair share as mandated by society.

I don't believe that. I believe that genius would flourish on a deserted island. Genius creates the infrastructure necessary to allow it to discover electricity and penicillin, invent the transistor, devise flight, formulate the Theory of Relativity, and realize that the earth revolves around the sun and not the other way 'round. In our world, genius doesn't create because of the engaged assistance of the society in which it exists; it creates in spite of that society.

Instead of harnessing genius like an ox yoked to a mill wheel, using its super strength to do what ordinary people cannot, we should free genius to create and keep the subsequent rewards, and we should thankfully, gratefully benefit from the improvement to our standard of living, our ease, our leisure, our toys, our health, and our entertainment, all resulting from those among us who are creators, inventors, thinkers. Without them we would be like sheep in the fields, eating grass, and without the good sense to come in out of the rain.

Ted Scott
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