The Cato 100

According to Stephen Moore and the late Julian Simon, the graph on the previous page – one of many in their book, It’s Getting Better All the Time: 100 Greatest Trends of the Last 100 Years – shows that OSHA and other government agencies “have had almost no impact on the trend toward greater safety.” Their reasoning seems a little sloppy, but it is refreshing to read something filled with good news for once.


Pirates of Copyright

In the fifth edition of his Copyright Book, William S. Strong extols the virtues of today’s vigorous international copyright protection scheme: “As international trade in copyrights becomes more and more valuable – in science, software, and entertainment – this system will likely prove to have been not merely fair-minded but foresighted as well.” As Strong reports, however, the United States has only lately become the Pooh-Bah of intellectual property protection.

Today, the U.S. objects strongly to the injustice of uncompensated use of intellectual property and struggles mightily to overcome the irresponsibility of governments that fail to vigorously protect the value of American brainpower. But for most of the past two centuries it was Uncle Sam who was the international copyright scofflaw-in-chief.

Edward Samuels of New York Law School has a new book, The Illustrated Story of Copyright, that captures the villainous performance of the U.S. as the Napster of the 19th century. With the aid of a 1944 Magnavox advertisement commemorating Gilbert and Sullivan, Samuels recalls their infuriation with Yankee pirates:

Samuels continues the story with Gilbert’s return a few years later to conduct the American premiere of The Mikado, including the composer’s entreaty to the audience at the end of the show:

The entire English-speaking world surrendered to H.M.S. Pinafore. In 1879 an American newspaper reported, “At present, there are forty-two companies playing Pinafore about the country. Companies formed after 6 p.m. yesterday are not included.”

Yet from this unprecedented American success, not one penny of profit came to Gilbert and Sullivan. In the absence of an international copyright law, any unscrupulous producer could “pirate” the words and music.

To overcome this situation, the famous partners came to the United States and staged an “Authorized Version.” With Sir Arthur Sullivan conducting the orchestra, and William Gilbert directing the performance, the official Pinafore received an ovation from music lovers of old New York.