

July 12, 2015

Mark Perry celebrates Thomas Sowell's 85th birthday.

Steve Hayward pointed out recently that economist Thomas Sowell shares the same birthday as Frederic Bastiat – they were both born on June 30. To recognize Bastiat's birthday I shared some of his quotes on CD earlier this week, and I'll now do the same today for Thomas Sowell, who turned 85 yesterday. Here is Thomas Sowell's [webpage](#) and here is his [Wikipedia entry](#). Milton Friedman once said, "The word 'genius' is thrown around so much that it's becoming meaningless, but nevertheless I think Tom Sowell is close to being one." And because Thomas Sowell is such a prolific writer and covers so many economic topics, I'll focus here on ten of my favorite Sowell quotes (and a video) on the topic of Obamacare:

1. From a 2013 Thomas Sowell's column "[An Old 'New' Program](#)":

*Like so many things that seem new, ObamaCare is in many ways old wine in new bottles. **What is older than the idea that some exalted elite know what is good for us better than we know ourselves?** Obama uses the rhetoric of going "forward," but he is in fact going **backward to an age when despots told everybody what they had better do and better not do.***

*Yet another way in which ObamaCare is an old political story is that it began as supposedly a way to deal with the problem of a segment of the population — those without health insurance. But, instead of directly helping those particular people to get insurance, **the "solution" was to expand the government's power over everybody, including people who already had health insurance that they wanted to keep.***

Since there has never been a society of human beings without at least some segment with some problem, this is a formula for a never-ending expansion of government power. ...

Perry referred to his post on Bastiat so we include that here too. Pickerhead was fifteen when first discovering [The Law](#) by Bastiat. Growing up in the Northeast, and regularly reading the NY Times and the Saturday Review Of Literature, your host was well on his way to becoming an obnoxious liberal. But The Law's argument about the nature of legalized plunder was, thankfully, too persuasive; "**But how is this legal plunder to be identified? Quite simply. See if the law takes from some persons what belongs to them, and gives it to other persons to whom it does not belong. See if the law benefits one citizen at the expense of another by doing what the citizen himself cannot do without committing a crime.**" [Here's Perry introducing Frederic Bastiat](#);

Tomorrow, June 30, marks the 214th anniversary of the birth of the great French economist [Frédéric Bastiat](#) (born June 30, 1801) whom economist Joseph Schumpeter called the "most brilliant economic journalist who ever lived." Celebrating Bastiat's birthday has become an annual tradition at CD, and below I present some of my favorite quotes from the great liberty-loving, influential French economist:

1. One of Bastiat's most famous and important writings was "The Petition of the French Candlemakers," which is such a clear and convincing satirical attack on trade protectionism that it often appears in textbooks on economics and international trade. Here's an excerpt from that famous 1845 essay:

*"We [French candlemakers] are suffering from the ruinous competition of a foreign rival who apparently works under conditions so far superior to our own for the production of light that he is flooding the domestic market with it at an incredibly low price; for the moment he appears, our sales cease, all the consumers turn to him, and a branch of French industry whose ramifications are innumerable is all at once reduced to complete stagnation. **This rival is none other than the sun.***

We ask you to pass a law requiring the closing of all windows, dormers, skylights, inside and outside shutters, curtains, casements, bull's-eyes, deadlights, and blinds—in short, all openings, holes, chinks, and fissures through which the light of the sun is wont to enter houses, to the detriment of the fair industries with which, we are proud to say, we have endowed the country, a country that cannot, without betraying ingratitude, abandon us today to so unequal a combat." ...

... Bastiat was truly an economic giant and deserves credit for his many significant and important intellectual contributions to economic thinking that are as relevant today as they were in France in the mid-1800s when Bastiat was writing, including: a) Bastiat was one of the first economists to warn us of the dangers of legal plunder, crony capitalism and trade protectionism, b) he helped us understand the importance of looking at both the unseen and delayed effects of legislation and regulation in addition to the immediate and visible effects, c) he was one of the most eloquent and articulate defenders of individual freedom and liberty who ever lived, and d) he was probably the strongest advocate for the consumer in human history. ...

Walter Russell Mead with an essay on the Black Church's contributions to our nation.

... But beyond all the yapping and the buzzing about gun control, the Confederate flag, and whether Dylann Roof was a terrorist or not, a very powerful truth emerged from the horror in Charleston: that the African-American church remains one of America's great national blessings. Yet again the African American church in the United States bore steadfast witness to the boundless, the infinite, the compassionate love of God. When the families of the murdered, martyred saints told Dylann Roof that they forgave him, when they prayed that he in his darkness might somehow find the light and the love of God, they reminded us what heroism truly is, and they showed us all what it means to follow Jesus Christ.

Too often the worst people in the religious world dominate the headlines: hucksters and hustlers, money grubbing televangelists, preacher-politicians, judgmental hypocrites, and sanctimonious snake oil peddlers. But every now and then something happens to show us what Christianity really is, and when it does the world stops in awe. President Obama was right to make grace the focus of his riveting eulogy; grace is always amazing, and without it no person, no family, and no nation can stand.

Watching the news from Berlin, I was reminded yet again that if the United States can be said to be an exceptional nation, it is the black church that has helped to make us one. Beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, blacks (often after suffering rejection by white churches) organized their own congregations and denominations. Black churches were the first serious social institutions that African Americans were free to shape and control in their own

way, and the spiritual and cultural blessings that have come to Americans of all races and indeed to the whole world from the witness and work of the black church are greater than most of us have ever understood.

I could see a little bit of this in my hotel in the former East Berlin last month. Martin Luther King's life and career made it that much harder for the East German police state to drive Christianity from the public square, and helped keep this center of Christian witness open. The tradition of non-violent protest that he did so much to shape would be crucial as Communism fell; not only in Germany but across central and eastern Europe, non-violent, peaceful protest played the key role in the democratic transitions that have brought freedom, prosperity, and peace to so many people in our time.

But it is America, more than any other country, that has been blessed by the African American church and the vibrant faith at its core. The black church gave generations of enslaved people spiritual comfort and a sense of self worth, comforting the afflicted and affirming the dignity of those the world held in contempt. Slavery was brutal and dehumanizing; the black church was a healing and civilizing presence. It was in the black church that African Americans developed political organizations, traditions of self government, experience managing their own affairs, and a sense of group solidarity and strength that helped these Americans rise and grow despite all the forces that sought to hold them down. ...

American Enterprise Institute

Happy 85th Birthday (June 30) Thomas Sowell

by Thomas Sowell



CONTRIBUTED BY THOMAS SOWELL

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1. From a 2013 Thomas Sowell’s column “[An Old ‘New’ Program](#)“:

Like so many things that seem new, ObamaCare is in many ways old wine in new bottles. **What is older than the idea that some exalted elite know what is good for us better than we know ourselves?** Obama uses the rhetoric of going “forward,” but he is in fact going **backward to an age when despots told everybody what they had better do and better not do.**

Yet another way in which ObamaCare is an old political story is that it began as supposedly a way to deal with the problem of a segment of the population — those without health insurance. But, instead of directly helping those particular people to get insurance, **the “solution” was to expand the government’s power over everybody, including people who already had health insurance that they wanted to keep.**

Since there has never been a society of human beings without at least some segment with some problem, this is a formula for a never-ending expansion of government power.

2. In this [2013 column](#), Thomas Sowell discusses “busybody politics“:

Whether in housing, education or innumerable other aspects of life, the key to busybody politics, and its endlessly imposed “solutions,” is that third parties pay no price for being wrong. This not only presents opportunities for the busybodies to engage in moral preening, but also to flatter themselves that they know better what is good for other people than these other people know for themselves.

ObamaCare is perhaps the ultimate in busybody politics. People who have never even run a drugstore, much less a hospital, blithely prescribe what must be done by the entire medical system, from doctors to hospitals to producers of pharmaceutical drugs to health insurance companies.

3. [Thomas Sowell wrote this](#) in 2009 when Obamacare was being rushed through Congress before the August recess:

As for those uninsured Americans who are supposedly the reason for all this sound and fury [Obamacare], there is remarkably little interest in why they are uninsured, despite the incessant repetition of the fact that they are. The endless repetition serves a political purpose but digging into the underlying facts might undermine that purpose. Many find it sufficient to say that the uninsured cannot “afford” medical insurance. But what you can afford depends not only on how much money you have but also on what your priorities are.

Many people who are uninsured have incomes from which medical insurance premiums could readily be paid without any undue strain. Many young people, especially, don’t buy medical insurance and elderly people already have Medicare. The poor have Medicaid available, even

though many do not bother to sign up for it, until they are already in the hospital– which they can do then.

Throwing numbers around about how many people are uninsured may create the impression that the uninsured cannot get medical treatment, when in fact they can get medical treatment at any hospital emergency room.

4. From one of Sowell's [Random Thoughts](#) columns in February 2014:

With his decision declaring ObamaCare constitutional, Chief Justice John Roberts turned what F.A. Hayek called “**The Road to Serfdom**” into a **super highway**. The government all but owns us now, and can order us to do pretty much whatever it wants us to do.

5. From Sowell's column in 2009 “[The ‘Costs’ of Medical Care: Part III](#)“:

If we cannot afford the quantity and quality of medical care that we want now, the government has no miraculous way of enabling us to afford it in the future.

If you think the government can lower medical costs by eliminating “waste, fraud and abuse,” as some Washington politicians claim, the logical question is: Why haven't they done that already?

Over the years, scandal after scandal has shown waste, fraud and abuse to be rampant in Medicare and Medicaid. Why would anyone imagine that a new government medical program will do what existing government medical programs have clearly failed to do?

If we cannot afford to pay for doctors, hospitals and pharmaceutical drugs now, how can we afford to pay for doctors, hospitals and pharmaceutical drugs, in addition to a new federal bureaucracy to administer a government-run medical system?

6. From [The Art of the Impossible](#) in 2013:

Do you seriously believe that millions more people can be given medical care and vast new bureaucracies created to administer payment for it, with no additional costs?

Just as there is no free lunch, there is no free red tape. Bureaucrats have to eat, just like everyone else, and they need a place to live and some other amenities. How do you suppose the price of medical care can go down when the costs of new government bureaucracies are added to the costs of the medical treatment itself?

And where are the extra doctors going to come from, to treat the millions of additional patients? Training more people to become doctors is not free. Politicians may ignore costs but ignoring those costs will not make them go away. With bureaucratically controlled medical care, you are going to need more doctors, just to treat a given number of patients, because time that is spent filling out government forms is time that is not spent treating patients. And doctors have the same 24 hours in the day as everybody else.

When you add more patients to more paperwork per patient, you are talking about still more costs. **How can that lower medical costs?** But although that may be impossible, *politics is the art of the impossible*. All it takes is rhetoric and a public that does not think beyond the rhetoric they hear.

7. From Thomas Sowell's book "[Basic Economics: A Common Sense Guide to the Economy](#)" (p. 570-571):

Often related to the notion of reasonable or affordable prices is the idea of keeping "costs" down by various government devices. But prices are not costs. Prices are what pay for costs. Where the costs are not covered by the prices that are legally allowed to be charged, the supply of the goods or services simply tends to decline in quantity or quality, whether those goods are apartments, medicines, or other things.

The cost of medical care is not reduced in the slightest when the government imposes lower rates of pay for doctors or hospitals. There are still just as many resources required as before to build and equip a hospital or to train a medical student to become a doctor. Countries which impose lower prices on medical treatment have ended up with longer waiting lists to see doctors, less modern equipment in their hospitals and, in the case of Britain, a substantial proportion of their doctors have come from Third World countries with lower quality medical training, because of an inadequate supply of British doctors willing to practice medicine in Britain. **Costs have not been lowered for the same medical care. Lower prices have been paid for lower quality treatment.**

MP: Something to keep in mind the next time you hear the frequently repeated nonsense that Obamacare "will bend the health care cost curve down."

8. From one of [Sowell's column in 2014](#):

The front page of a local newspaper in northern California featured the headline "The Promise Denied," lamenting the under-representation of women in computer engineering. The continuation of this long article on an inside page had the headline, "Who is to blame for this?"

In other words, the fact that reality does not match the preconceptions of the intelligentsia shows that there is something wrong with reality, for which somebody must be blamed. Apparently their preconceptions cannot be wrong.

Women, like so many other groups, seem not to be dedicated to fulfilling the prevailing fetish among the intelligentsia that every demographic group should be equally represented in all sorts of places. Women have their own agendas, and if these agendas do not usually include computer engineering, what is to be done? Draft women into engineering schools to satisfy the preconceptions of our self-anointed saviors? Or will a propaganda campaign be sufficient to satisfy those who think that they should be making other people's choices for them?

That kind of thinking is how we got ObamaCare.

9. From Sowell's column "[Listening to a Liar: Part II](#)" in 2009:

Even those who can believe that Obama can conjure up the money [to insure millions more people] through eliminating "waste, fraud and abuse" should ask themselves where he is going to conjure up the additional doctors, nurses, and hospitals needed to take care of millions more patients.

If he can't pull off that miracle, then government-run medical care in the United States can be expected to produce what government-run medical care in Canada, Britain, and other countries has produced—delays of weeks or months to get many treatments, not to mention arbitrary rationing decisions by bureaucrats.

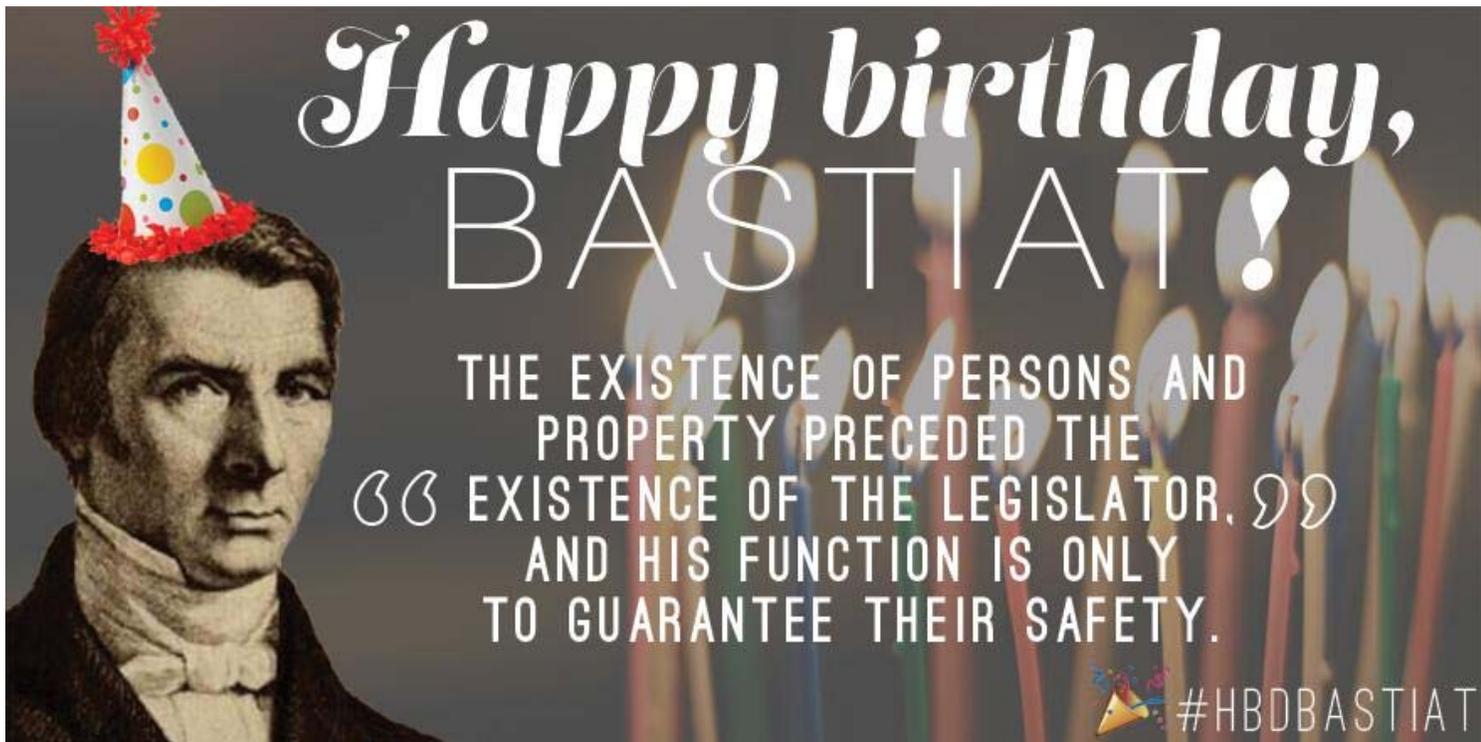
Con men understand that their job is not to use facts to convince skeptics but to use words to help the gullible to believe what they want to believe. No message has been more welcomed by the gullible, in countries around the world, than the promise of something for nothing. That is the core of Barack Obama's medical care plan.

10. In the video below from 2009, Thomas Sowell discusses Obama's proposed (at that time) health care reform:

Carpe Diem

[Happy Birthday \(June 30\), Frederic Bastiat](#)

by Mark Perry



Tomorrow, June 30, marks the 214th anniversary of the birth of the great French economist [Frédéric Bastiat](#) (born June 30, 1801) whom economist Joseph Schumpeter called the “most brilliant economic journalist who ever lived.” Celebrating Bastiat's birthday has become an annual tradition at CD, and below I present some of my favorite quotes from the great liberty-loving, influential French economist:

1. One of Bastiat's most famous and important writings was “[The Petition of the French Candlemakers](#),” which is such a clear and convincing satirical attack on trade protectionism that it often appears in textbooks on economics and international trade. Here's an excerpt from that famous 1845 essay:

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sales cease, all the consumers turn to him, and a branch of French industry whose ramifications are innumerable is all at once reduced to complete stagnation. **This rival is none other than the sun.**

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2. In 1845, as a solution to counteract job losses in some French domestic industries (like textiles) due to free trade, [Bastiat proposed to the King of France](#) that he “forbid all loyal subjects to use their right hands.” Bastiat predicted that:

...as soon as all right hands are either cut off or tied down, things will change. Twenty times, thirty times as many embroiderers, pressers and ironers, seamstresses, dressmakers and shirtmakers, will not suffice to meet the national demand. Yes, we may picture a touching scene of prosperity in the dressmaking business. Such bustling about! Such activity! Such animation! Each dress will busy a hundred fingers instead of ten. No young woman will any longer be idle. Not only will more young women be employed, but each of them will earn more, for all of them together will be unable to satisfy the demand.

3. Here's Bastiat's famous quote on [legal plunder](#) (now frequently referred to as “crony capitalism”):

Legal plunder can be committed in an infinite number of ways. Thus we have an infinite number of plans for organizing it: tariffs, protection, benefits, subsidies, encouragements, progressive taxation, public schools, guaranteed jobs, guaranteed profits, minimum wages, a right to relief, a right to the tools of labor, free credit, and so on, and so on. All these plans as a whole—with their common aim of **legal plunder**—constitute socialism.

But how is this legal plunder to be identified? Quite simply. **See if the law takes from some persons what belongs to them, and gives it to other persons to whom it does not belong. See if the law benefits one citizen at the expense of another by doing what the citizen himself cannot do without committing a crime.**

Note: As I pointed out [recently on CD](#), the **minimum wage law** is a form of **legal plunder** because it takes money from some persons (business owners) what belongs to them, and gives it to other persons (unskilled workers) to whom it does not belong. The minimum wage law clearly benefits some citizens (entry-level workers) at the expense of employers by doing what the workers cannot do without committing a crime of theft. So let's put aside all of the economic arguments about what economic theory and empirical evidence show regarding the possible employment effects of government mandated minimum wages, and consider something even more basic and fundamental: the **minimum wage is legalized, government-sanctioned plunder/theft from business owners, and therefore on that basis should be considered morally objectionable, unethical and unacceptable.**

4. Four days before his death in 1850, Frederic Bastiat sent [this message to a friend](#):

Treat all economic questions from the viewpoint of the consumer, for the interests of the consumer are the interests of the human race.

5. When a new railroad line was proposed from France to Spain, the French town of Bordeaux lobbied for a break in the tracks so that “all goods and passengers are forced to stop at that city,” which would therefore be “profitable for boatmen, porters, owners of hotels, etc.” Using *reductio ad absurdum*, Bastiat proposed that if a break in the tracks provided economic benefits and jobs for one town and served the general public interest, then it would be good for breaks in the tracks at dozens and dozens of other French towns, to the absurd point that there would be a railroad composed of a whole series of breaks in the tracks, so that it would actually become a “[negative railway](#).”

6. In his famous essay “[What Is Seen and What Is Not Seen](#),” Bastiat was one of the first economists to make the very important distinction between the immediate, concentrated and visible effects of legislation or regulation and the delayed, dispersed and invisible effects:

In the economic sphere an act, a habit, an institution, a law produces not only one effect, but a series of effects. Of these effects, the first alone is immediate; it appears simultaneously with its cause; it is seen. The other effects emerge only subsequently; they are not seen; we are fortunate if we foresee them.

There is only one difference between a bad economist and a good one: the bad economist confines himself to the *visible* effect; the good economist takes into account both the effect that can be seen and those effects that must be *foreseen*.

Yet this difference is tremendous; for it almost always happens that when the immediate consequence is favorable, the later consequences are disastrous, and vice versa. Whence it follows that the bad economist pursues a small present good that will be followed by a great evil to come, while the good economist pursues a great good to come, at the risk of a small present evil.

To illustrate the principle of “what is seen and what is not seen,” Bastiat told a story that became known as the “The Parable of the Broken Window,” which was modernized in the 1940s by Henry Hazlitt in his book “[Economics in One Lesson](#).” Here’s a quick summary:

A baker has saved \$50 to buy a new suit, but then a young hoodlum throws a brick through the shop owner’s window and the baker now has to spend \$50 to replace the window and forego the purchase of the new suit. If one ignored the invisible effects of the broken window, one could argue then that the hoodlum was a public benefactor by stimulating business for the window company that now receives \$50 to replace the window. But instead of the baker having \$50 for a new suit and a window, he now only has the window and no suit. And the invisible unseen party in the parable is the tailor, who would have benefited \$50 from selling the baker a new suit, but now loses that business. Observers will see the visible new window but will never see the invisible new suit, because it will now never be made.

Here’s how Bastiat explains the unseen, invisible effects of the shopkeeper spending six francs to replace the broken window:

It is not seen that as our shopkeeper has spent six francs upon one thing, he cannot spend them upon another. It is not seen that if he had not had a window to replace, he would, perhaps, have replaced his old shoes, or added another book to his library. **In short, he would have employed his six francs in some way, which this accident has prevented.**

7. “The State [government] is the great fiction, through which everybody endeavors to live at the expense of everybody else.”

~*The State* in Journal des Débats (1848).

8. “When plunder becomes a way of life for a group of men in a society, over the course of time they create for themselves a legal system that authorizes it and a moral code that glorifies it.”

~*Economic Sophisms*, 2nd series (1848)

9. “Everyone wants to live at the expense of the State. They forget that the State lives at the expense of everyone.”

~Source unknown

10. “Trade protection accumulates upon a single point the good which it effects [for domestic producers], while the evil inflicted is infused throughout the mass [of consumers]. The one strikes the eye at a first glance [benefits to producers], while the other becomes perceptible only to close investigation [losses to consumers].”

~Source unknown

Bottom Line: Bastiat was truly an economic giant and deserves credit for his many significant and important intellectual contributions to economic thinking that are as relevant today as they were in France in the mid-1800s when Bastiat was writing, including: a) Bastiat was one of the first economists to warn us of the dangers of legal plunder, crony capitalism and trade protectionism, b) he helped us understand the importance of looking at both the unseen and delayed effects of legislation and regulation in addition to the immediate and visible effects, c) he was one of the most eloquent and articulate defenders of individual freedom and liberty who ever lived, and d) he was probably the strongest advocate for the consumer in human history.

Happy Birthday Bastiat!

Update: Here’s a great quote about Bastiat from Murray Rothbard: “Bastiat was indeed a lucid and superb writer, whose brilliant and witty essays and fables to this day are remarkable and devastating demolitions of protectionism and of all forms of government subsidy and control.”

That Rothbard quote comes from [The Mises Institute](#), which reminds us that “Bastiat turns 214 and is still relevant.” The Mises Institute is offering some books by Bastiat including the [Bastiat Collection Pocket Edition](#) for \$14 and [The Law](#) for \$5.

American Interest

The Black Church

Charleston and the Confederate Flag: Part One

by Walter Russell Mead

If there is one thing that the history of South Carolina may have to teach the rest of the country it is this: that nothing is more exceptional about American history than the way that the African

American church has helped make us a nation that is better, happier, and more united than we have any right to expect.

The news that the legislature in my native state has voted to haul down the Confederate flag from the grounds of the legislature caps one of the most consequential months in South Carolina's history in a very long time. When I was born in Columbia back in 1952, every child in the state by law had to have his or her race identified on the birth certificate; that classification was intended to follow you for the rest of your life, determining where you went to school, what neighborhoods you could live in, what restaurants and hotels you could visit, what jobs you could have—even what bathrooms and water fountains you could use.

When you went to sporting events in those days, the bands were ecumenical. They played both the Star Spangled Banner and Dixie; people stood, hands on hearts, for both. This was progress. In my grandfather's day only one of those anthems would have been played. This week, South Carolina takes another long step away from a shadowed past. The Confederate flag, which means many things to many people but has a long association with segregationist ideas and Jim Crow laws, will be coming down. Like most symbolic actions, this ratifies a change that has already taken place. South Carolina's citizens had moved on from Jim Crow long ago. If Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner had heard that a black Republican senator and a nonwhite female Republican governor played key roles in the movement to disestablish the Confederate emblem they would have sung hosannahs to the Lord. That today's Republican Party in South Carolina mostly represents the white majority who once voted Dixiecrat and Democrat makes the change more consequential, not less. South Carolina Republicans may not be the NAACP's favorite American political organization, and the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow still hang heavily over the state, but my native state has turned an important page.

My father remembers a moment when he first believed that things could really change there. He was at a football game between the University of South Carolina and Clemson soon after African-Americans were first allowed to compete in varsity sports at these previously segregated schools. When two of the black Clemson players teamed up to deliver a particularly hard and effective hit to a black South Carolina linebacker, my father heard one of the white fans in the row in front of him say to his friends, "Damn! Look at what those (N-word)s did to our colored boy!"

Maybe not the greatest moment in racial brotherhood in modern times, but in that time and in that place it was a sign that at least some South Carolinians were developing the ability to look past the color line to see individual differences, however faintly.

Now things have come much, much farther. Those good old boys in the football stands probably voted both for Tim Scott and for Niki Hailey. It wouldn't be surprising if one or both of them supports Ben Carson for the GOP nomination. The color line hasn't faded away, but where I come from anyway, it ain't what it used to be.

The flag story, of course, started with a massacre. I was in Berlin last month to speak at a conference sponsored by the Heinrich Boell Foundation when the murders took place. They put us up at the Albrechtshof, a small Berlin hotel that served as a kind of Christian refuge during the GDR times. Martin Luther King stayed there on his visit to East Germany and the lobby has photographs of the civil rights leader taken during his stay. It was a good place to be as the news from Charleston gradually sank in; it was a reminder that the contributions of African American Christianity and the black church to this world are so much greater and more important than vicious eruptions of hate like the one that led poor Dylann Roof to his terrible crime.

It was also a good time to be out of the United States for a few days, to watch the media frenzy from a distance and to reflect on the continuing American tragedy of racial hate and political violence. Race, violence, and religion don't bring out the best in our national discourse.

Facebook, Twitter, and much of the regular media seemed even more shrill and contentious than usual as Left and Right tried to turn the massacre to political account. I was glad to have some time to walk the streets of Berlin, past streets named for Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Hannah Arendt, around the rebuilt Reichstag building and the Brandenburg Gate, to retrace the route of the old Berlin Wall in the city core, and to watch crowds of tourists from all over the world explore the Holocaust memorial across the street from the American Embassy, just a short distance from the underground bunker where Adolf Hitler killed himself as his empire collapsed around him.

But beyond all the yapping and the buzzing about gun control, the Confederate flag, and whether Dylann Roof was a terrorist or not, a very powerful truth emerged from the horror in Charleston: that the African-American church remains one of America's great national blessings. Yet again the African American church in the United States bore steadfast witness to the boundless, the infinite, the compassionate love of God. When the families of the murdered, martyred saints told Dylann Roof that they forgave him, when they prayed that he in his darkness might somehow find the light and the love of God, they reminded us what heroism truly is, and they showed us all what it means to follow Jesus Christ.

Too often the worst people in the religious world dominate the headlines: hucksters and hustlers, money grubbing televangelists, preacher-politicians, judgmental hypocrites, and sanctimonious snake oil peddlers. But every now and then something happens to show us what Christianity really is, and when it does the world stops in awe. President Obama was right to make grace the focus of his riveting eulogy; grace is always amazing, and without it no person, no family, and no nation can stand.

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I could see a little bit of this in my hotel in the former East Berlin last month. Martin Luther King's life and career made it that much harder for the East German police state to drive Christianity from the public square, and helped keep this center of Christian witness open. The tradition of non-violent protest that he did so much to shape would be crucial as Communism fell; not only in Germany but across central and eastern Europe, non-violent, peaceful protest played the key role in the democratic transitions that have brought freedom, prosperity, and peace to so many people in our time.

But it is America, more than any other country, that has been blessed by the African American church and the vibrant faith at its core. The black church gave generations of enslaved people spiritual comfort and a sense of self worth, comforting the afflicted and affirming the dignity of those the world held in contempt. Slavery was brutal and dehumanizing; the black church was a healing and civilizing presence. It was in the black church that African Americans developed political organizations, traditions of self government, experience managing their own affairs, and a sense of group solidarity and strength that helped these Americans rise and grow despite all the forces that sought to hold them down.

All that is a spiritual legacy rich enough and deep enough to make any faith stand tall in world history, but the black church has done more. It is easy in America today to decry the state of racial feeling, and in no way do I want to minimize the pain and the trouble and the sorrow that our racial divisions and racist legacies bring to the country. But they are so much less than they could be and perhaps should be given our history. Look at the ethnic and nationalist hatreds overseas: at the hatreds between Shi'a and Sunni, Arab and Kurd, Hutu and Tutsi, Bosnian and Serb – and so many more around the world.

Whatever we have in the United States, it is not that. And despite the nasty, evil actions of people like poor Dylann Roof and the crazy haters among us, we are as a people unlikely to go there. Our racial divisions are painful and they are bitter and they cause all kinds of injustice and hurt. But we have not gone the way of Old World, where tribal and racial divisions lead to all out wars, large scale ethnic cleansing, and ugly blood feuds that simmer for generations.

There are several important factors that have helped keep us from experiencing the full ugly consequences of the hatred, prejudice, and bitterness with which so much of American history is so tragically marked. But the one that looms largest in my mind, and that gets the least respect and attention, is the constant Christian witness and gracious, forgiving love that has been the gift of the African American church and of its loving savior first to American blacks and then to the whole country.

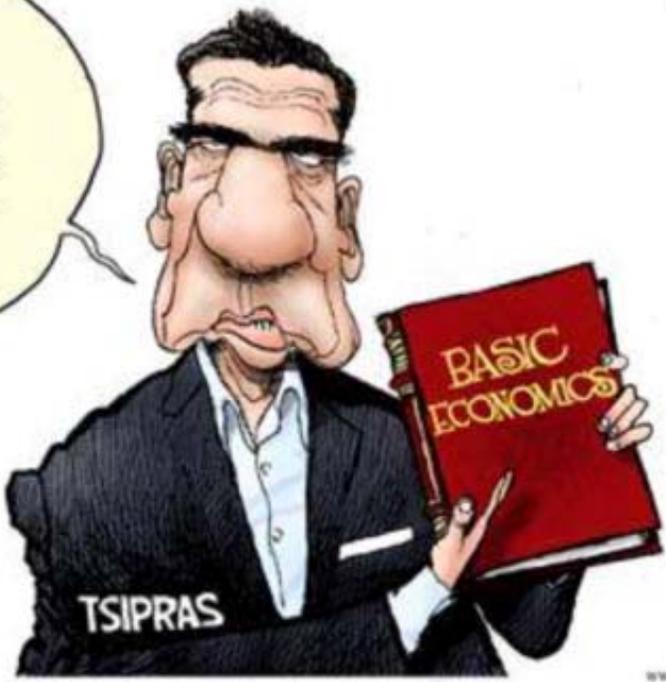
Americans of all races owe much more to the steadfast witness of the black church than most of us understand. We read in the Bible about God's love for the poor and the oppressed, about his capacity to redeem and transform, and about the transfiguring power of forgiveness and grace. We hear these things and we nod our heads sagely, but we fail to grasp just how much our daily lives are blessed by this power. As a nation, we have seen and done many hateful and horrible things, but hate and horror have been met, as they were met last month in Charleston, by something greater, higher, better.

If there is one thing that the history of South Carolina may have to teach the rest of the country it is this: that nothing is more exceptional about American history than the way that the African American church has helped make us a nation that is better, happier, and more united than we have any right to expect. The grace of God's forgiving love, poured out over the black church for so long, is reshaping our country, softening our hearts, and making us better people than we deserve to be.

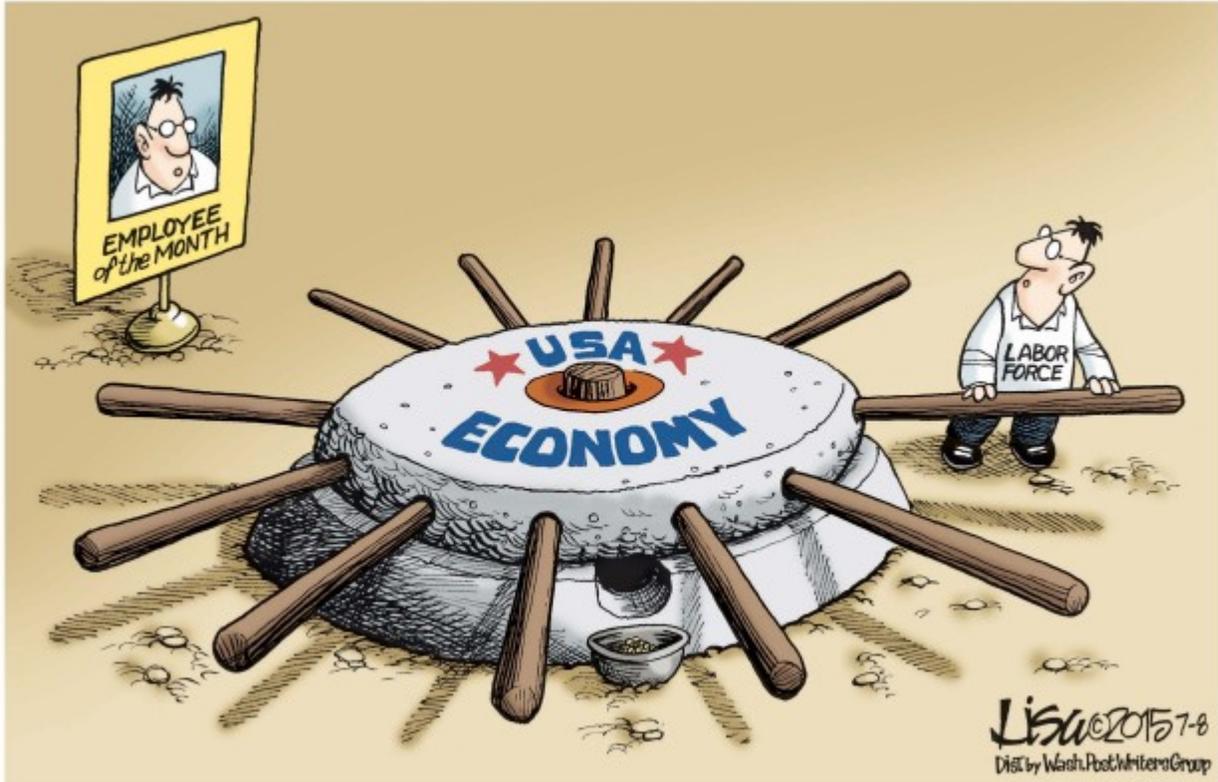
That is what grace is, that is what grace does. It is amazing, as it is amazing that a song written by a repentant slave trader could become an anthem that unites the descendants of slaves and of slave owners, of the victims and the perpetrators of segregation.

As the Confederate flag comes down for the last time from a government building in the city where I was born, I will be giving thanks to God for the miracles of grace that have brought us all so far.

IT'S ALL
GREEK
to ME...



TSIPRAS



2015 GREEK ECONOMIC OLYMPICS

100-METER HURDLES



SYNCHRONIZED PRAYING



JAVELIN TOSS



WEIGHT LIFTING



HAMMER THROW



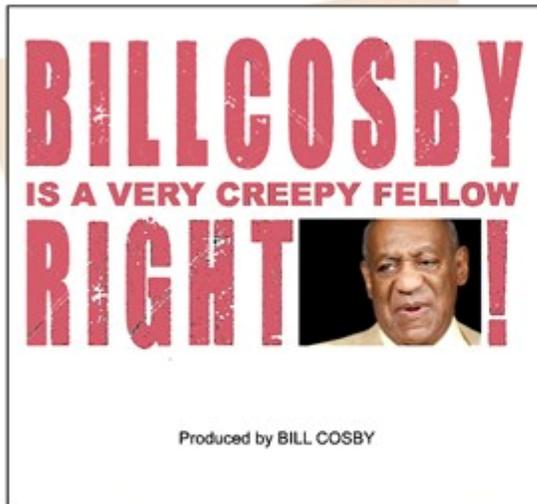
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Side one

- New Girlfriend - 0:51**
- Ludes - 2:31**
- Wrestling - 1:31**
- Nap Time - 4:21**
- The Devil Made Him Do It - 0:58**
- The Lone Ranger - 3:07**
- Prescription Refill - 1:53**

Side two

- Frizzle Frazzle Gossip - 3:45**
- Girls and Wonderfulness - 0:59**
- Out to Get Me - 5:45**
- An Innocent Man - 0:45**
- The Neanderthal - 6:44**
- Zippity Lippity - 4:45**
- Prison Pudding - 3:48**

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