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Subject: Greg Brown's Weekend Reading and Other Things.... 1/19/2014
Date: Sun, 19 Jan 2014 08:10:13 +0000
Attachments: The_Hospital_Is_No_Place_for_the_Elderly_JONATHAN_RAUCH_The_Atlantic_November_20,_2013.docx; MATH_scores_per_country_2012.docx; Finland_map.docx; Socialism_101_Christian_Science_Monitor.docx; High-speed_railroading_The_Economist_Jul_22nd_2010.docx; America_in_2013,_as_Told_in_Charts_Steven_Rattner_NYT_December_30,_2013.docx; Elizabeth_Warren's_Year-Two_Focus,_Improving_The_Economic_Fortunes_Of_Ordinary_Americans_Steve_LeBlanc_Huff_Post_01.11.2014.docx; Amiri_Baraka,_influential_African_American_writer_and_firebrand,_dies_at_79_Matt_Schudel_TWP_01.11.2014.docx; Amiri_Baraka_bio.docx; No_Jobs,_no_benefits_and_lousy_pay_Editorial_Board_NYT_01.10.2014.docx; The_Conservative_Response_to_the_War_on_Poverty_Discussion_Jared_Bernstein_Huff_Post_01.13.2013.docx; Who's_poor_in_America,_50_years_into_the_War_on_Poverty,_a_data_portrait_Drew_Desilver_PEW_January_13,_2014.docx; Bruce_Springsteen_bio.docx
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DEAR FRIEND.....

Between Christmas and New Year's I flew to Europe from Los Angeles for two days of business meetings and on my outbound flight I sat next to a wonderful American women who returning home to Finland, and since no one really lives in Finland by choice, I had to ask why? Her initial answer was that she married a Finn, who she met while working at Nokia. But what took me aback was how she has since become a huge fan of Finland and would live nowhere else other than in Australia when she and her husband retires in twenty years or so. My belief is that Finland was the extremely poor step-child in Scandinavia, sort of backwards with little opportunity, poor weather bland food and nothing to do. As a result, I couldn't imagine even visiting Finland and I definitely didn't believe that there was any way that Finland could serve as a role model to America or even the rest of Europe. Boy did she change that.

First of all, Finnish students consistently place in the *Top 10*, if not in the *Top 5* and some years in the *Top 3* in the world. How could this be possible? Remember Finland is a dull backward socialist country with bad weather. My friend explained that one of the reasons why Finland works is that they have *democratic socialism* whereby the number one priority of almost every politician in the country is to do what is best for the maximum amount of people even if it doesn't benefit the market. In Finland, their social democracy doesn't encourage or prioritize capitalist competition but instead encourages and prioritizes democracy in its best sense. In America, on the other hand, capitalism has had a long history of undermining democracy and hence public good. It's not even that Finland is an absolute perfect example of socialism any more than America is an absolute perfect example of capitalism. Rather, the point is that America strives toward a more capitalist worldview and Finland strives toward a more socialist worldview. Two different strivings leading to two very different results.

Since the 1980s, the main driver of Finnish education policy has been the idea that every child should have exactly the same opportunity to learn, regardless of family background, income, or geographic location. Education has been seen first and foremost not as a way to produce star performers, but as an instrument to even out social inequality. In the Finnish view, schools should be healthy, safe environments for children. This starts with the basics. Finland offers all pupils free school meals, easy access to health care, psychological counseling, and individualized student guidance. This point is almost always ignored or brushed aside in the U.S. seems especially poignant at the moment, after the financial crisis and Occupy Wall Street movement have brought the problems of inequality in America into such sharp focus. The chasm between those who can afford $35,000 in tuition per child per year — or even just the price of a house in a good public school district — and the other "99 percent" is painfully plain to see.

In Finland every citizen has a right to a free education from k through PhDs and other advanced degrees. So a twenty-five year old engineer or twenty-eight year old doctor receives their complete education without incurring any debt. As a result, the society as a whole is much better educated then here in America with superior skill sets. Healthcare is the same. Totally free.... And for young families, maternity leave is three years *(yes 3 years from the birth of your last child)* making it easy for families to stay together as well as providing more family support for the children and the family unit as a whole. From the age of three to six both the state and large corporations offer free pre-school until 6pm and all companies allow employees to leave work at 5:30pm so that they can pick up the children and spend time to their families. And companies don't resist this because it adds to the quality of life for employees, the central tenet of Democratic Socialism.

Obviously all of this comes at a price. The top tax bracket for Finns is 42%. But remember, education and healthcare is free and one can retire at 62 years old with three-quarters retirement income. And remember, in Finland you don't go broke if you have a medical condition that doesn't let you work. Hence the elderly in Finland don't have buy cans of cat food to survive and younger Finns can get retrained when they lose their jobs or need to develop a new skill set. But again the real difference between Finland and the US is that political decisions are based on the greater good of the mass, instead of the self-interest of a very few.

With this said, I have never been to Finland and I really only have had interactions with a few Finns, so what I am describing is from what I have read. The Finnish model is not going to work in every country as all countries are different, and Finland is a small nation (5.4 million) with a much more homogeneous population than the United States. When Finnish policymakers decided to reform the country's education system in the 1970s, they did so because they realized that to be competitive, Finland couldn't rely on manufacturing or its scant natural resources and instead had to invest in a knowledge-based economy.

With America's manufacturing industries now in decline, the goal of educational policy in the U.S. — as articulated by most everyone from President Obama on down — is to preserve American competitiveness by doing the same thing. Finland's experience suggests that to win at that game, a country has to prepare not just some of its population well, but all of its population well, for the new economy. To possess some of the best schools in the world might still not be good enough if there are children being left behind. Remember that when President Kennedy was making his appeal for advancing American science and technology by putting a man on the moon by the end of the 1960′s, many said it couldn't be done. But he had a dream. Just like Martin Luther King a few years later had a dream. Those dreams came true. Finland's dream was that we want to have a good public education for every child regardless of where they go to school or what kind of families they come from, and many even in Finland said it couldn'couldn't be done.

Clearly, these people were wrong. It is possible to create equality. And perhaps even more important — as a challenge to the American way of thinking about education reform — Finland's experience shows that it is possible to achieve excellence by focusing not on competition, but on cooperation, and not on choice, but on equity. The problem facing education in America isn't the ethnic diversity of the population but the economic inequality of society, and this is precisely the problem that Finnish education reform addressed. More equity at home might just be what America needs to be more competitive abroad. Finland has proven that if politicians get together with the goal of working together for the common good of the masses based on policies that support free education and healthcare, and results should be based on more than monetary milestones and ideology purity – not only will more people and the country will prosper but more people will experience a better quality of life. As such, from what I have read, the Finish model of democratic socialism works. Yes capitalism works but not for everything and if the Finish model works for education, healthcare, etc., why not use it.....

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FINLAND

Finland, officially the Republic of Finland, is a Nordic country situated in the Fennoscandian region of Northern Europe. It is bordered by Sweden to the west, Norway to the north, Russia to the east, and Estonia to the south across the Gulf of Finland. As of 2012, Finland's population was around 5.4 million, with the majority concentrated in its southern regions. In terms of area, it is the eighth largest country in Europe and the most sparsely populated country in the European Union. Finland is a parliamentary republic with a central government based in the capital of Helsinki, local governments in 336 municipalities and an autonomous region, the Åland Islands. About one million residents live in the Greater Helsinki area (consisting of Helsinki, Espoo, Kauniainen, and Vantaa), which also produces a third of the country's GDP. Other large cities include Tampere, Turku, Oulu, Jyväskylä, Lahti, and Kuopio.

From the 12th until the early 19th century, Finland was a part of Sweden, a legacy reflected in the prevalence of the Swedish language and its official status. It then became an autonomous Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire until the Russian Revolution. This prompted the Finnish Declaration of Independence, which was followed by a civil war where the pro-Bolshevik "Reds" were defeated by the pro-conservative "Whites" with support from the German Empire. After a brief attempt to establish a monarchy, Finland became a republic. Finland's experience of World War II involved three separate conflicts: the Winter War (1939–1940) and Continuation War (1941–1944) against the Soviet Union and the Lapland War (1944–1945) against Nazi Germany. Following the end of the war, Finland joined the United Nations in 1955 and established an official policy of neutrality. Nevertheless, it remained fairly active on the world stage, joining the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1969, the European Union in 1995, and the eurozone at its inception in 1999.

Finland was a relative latecomer to industrialisation, remaining a largely agrarian country until the 1950s. Thereafter, it rapidly developed an advanced economy while building an extensive Nordic-style welfare state, resulting in widespread prosperity and a nominal per capita income of over $46,000 as of 2012, among the highest in the world. Subsequently, Finland is a top performer in numerous metrics of national performance, including education, economic competitiveness, civil liberties, quality of life, and human development. Newsweek magazine ranked Finland as the overall "best country in the world" after summing various factors.

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The ***Christian Science Monitor*** ran a series on the economies of Europe. With Peter Ford doing the assessment on the Finnish "*social model.*"

Some fast facts:

- Ranked #1 for press freedom by Reporters Without Borders (U.S.? #22)
- Ranked #2 (after Sweden) in investment in research and development ([redacted])
- Free university education
- Subsidized day care
- Most competitive economy in the world by World Economic Forum ranking
- Among the world's most egalitarian societies

As is typical of anything you may learn of the successes of socialism through the U.S. media, the author —either by editorial requirement or acculturation—needed to find reasons why socialism may work in Finland but not here. Or why it might not be desirable. I really don't understand that sentence other than to say that we can probably learn for Finland's socialist programs and policies and where they don't apply to us disregard them.... But we have to start thinking differently and examining other successes is s good first step.

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Are government policies and business practices out of touch with the changing state of American families? A new survey, which is part of a broader examination of the role of women in society, shows that many Americans believe the answer to that question is yes. The survey was commissioned for the ***Shriver Report***, the third study spearheaded by **NBC News** reporter Maria Shriver, in collaboration with the Center for American Progress, a progressive think tank. The report, which will be unveiled with a series of appearances and events beginning Sunday, notes that there has been "a seismic shift" in the structure of American families, including the rise of single-parent households and that the majority of children born to women under 30 have unmarried mothers. At the same time, the report argues that government and business have been slow to recognize the changes and adopt policies that recognize these new realities. The report asserts that this has been particularly hard on women, who carry burdens of being both breadwinners and principal caregivers to children, particularly those living on the financial brink. What the accompanying national survey of 3,500 adults shows is that more Americans think government and business should adapt to the changing reality of American families as compared with those who say government should do what it can to promote traditional marriage and two-parent households.

The survey looked at attitudes of all Americans and particularly *"women on the brink,"* which the authors say account for one in three women in America, probing issues of financial well-being, government policy, and personal decisions that have affected individuals' lives. The polling was done by the Democratic firm of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and the Republican firm TargetPoint Consulting. One section of the survey prefaced questions by noting the statistics on births to women under age 30 and asked people about the best role for government in these times. Far more Americans say government should address society as it now is rather than seeking to return to what it was. For example, the survey found that 64 percent of all respondents and 77 percent of women on the brink agreed with this statement: *"Government should set a goal of helping society adapt to the reality of single-parent families and use its resources to help children and mothers succeed regardless of their family status."* In contrast, only a bare majority of Americans and of women on the brink agreed with this statement: "Government should set a goal of reducing the number of children born to single parents and use its resources to encourage marriage and two-parent-families."

More Americans agreed that women raising children on their own face major challenges and that government, business and communities should help them financially than those who agreed with the statement that unmarried women who have children should take complete financial responsibility for those children. The contrasting choices framed what remains a broad political divide over the impact of cultural and demographic changes that have transformed the country in a matter of decades. Research has shown that children have a greater opportunity for success if they are raised in intact, two-parent households. But the answers to the survey indicate that many people, particularly financially stressed women who head single-parent households, say government should worry less about what has happened and do more to find ways to help their families succeed.

Women and men expressed general optimism about their financial futures, though younger women were far more positive than older women. Almost nine in 10 women under age 30 said they believe their financial situation will get better during the next five years, while just a third of those over age 64 expressed that same view. One striking finding on this question was that there was no difference between women in households with annual incomes of less than $20,000 and those with incomes of more than $100,000. But those lower-income women were much more likely than wealthier women to express the view that the harder they work, the more they fall behind, and that even if they made the right choices in life, *"I still could not get ahead because the economy doesn't work for people like me."* About seven in 10 lower-income women said they regretted not staying in school longer, and slightly higher percentages said their regrets included not making better financial decisions and not putting a higher priority on education and career.

One thing that divorced women did not regret was getting out of their marriages. Only about a fifth of the lower-income women who also were divorced said they regretted not staying in their marriages longer. In contrast, the survey found that divorced men were far more likely to say they regretted not staying longer in their marriages than were women. When the survey turned to questions about what business could do, lower-income women put as high a priority on policies that provide greater flexibility to accommodate for family responsibilities as they did on increased pay and benefits. The policies that drew the highest responses were paid sick leave or leave to care for a seriously ill family member. Among the most popular governmental policy options were equal pay for women for equal work (popular among women and men) and protecting the right of pregnant women and new mothers to prevent them from being fired or demoted when they become pregnant or take maternity leave.

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One has to love Elizabeth Warren who recently announce that her next two-year focus will be to improve the economic fortune of ordinary Americans and addressing economic inequality. And then you have to wonder why this isn't every politicians emphasis instead of garnering television time to enhance a Presidential bid. For Warren, stabilizing the ordinary American family's finances rests on a number of pillars — from reining in student debt to easing what she calls the nation's retirement crisis to doubling funding for federal research programs. Warren has also positioned herself as a passionate defender of Social Security, even bucking Obama on changes she said would weaken a key protection for millions of older Americans. "Let me put it this way: I disagree with anyone who talks about cutting Social Security benefits," Warren said in a recent interview with The Associated Press. "This is a time when we need to talk about the hard decisions we have to make to make sure the Social Security system is stable and will pay benefits forever into the future." Warren said while adjustments to the program may be needed, calls from some Republicans to privatize Social Security or cut benefits are misguided. She said Americans are hitting their retirement years with more debt, less savings and fewer pension benefits than a generation ago. Given that, she said, this is the "absolute worst time" to talk about reeling in benefits.

Web Site: [redacted]

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Another issue Warren is fired up about is soaring student loans, which she said is leaving new graduates with suffocating debts that can stifle their futures. Warren has filed what she calls a "skin-in-the-game bill" that tries to pressure colleges to keep costs down for students and ensure they get a meaningful diploma when they graduate. As part of the bill, colleges that don't meet on-time graduation rates and other criteria must refund a portion of a student's loan. "Part of the problem we've got is that the federal government pumps billions of dollars into higher education through the federal loan program and grant program and yet asks for no accountability from the colleges," said Warren, a former Harvard Law School professor.

Warren also said she wants to double spending for the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation. Warren said money spent on finding new treatments and cures can not only improve people's health and lengthen lives but can also have economic benefits. She said a drug that would help delay the onset of the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease for five years would end up saving trillions in health care costs in the ensuing decades. Those kinds of breakthroughs need the support of federal tax dollars, she said. "That is our best chance going forward," she said. "This is one we have to get out there and fight for." Doubling the NIH and NSF budgets would also be a boost to Massachusetts, which gets a significant share of those funds.

Although she's become a hero to the liberal wing of her party, Warren has no shortage of critics — and not just among conservatives and Republicans. She came under fire last year from the centrist think tank Third Way, whose leaders penned an opinion article for the Wall Street Journal that described her plans to expand Social Security benefits and delay Medicare reforms as part of a "we-can-have-it-all fantasy." Warren acknowledged that winning the support of at least some Republicans is important to helping move her agenda. She said she's already found common ground on individual issues with some GOP senators, including Arizona's John McCain, Florida's Marco Rubio and Alaska's Lisa Murkowski.

Just this week, Warren teamed with Sen. Tom Coburn, a Republican from Oklahoma, on legislation to hold federal enforcement agencies accountable by increasing public transparency of confidential settlements. At the same time, Warren is working to aid Democratic re-election efforts, including raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for her political action committee — money she uses to support fellow Democrats. But Warren said it will take more than just senators talking to other senators to bring about change. She said the voices of citizens are critical to policy debates in Washington. "It's both halves here. It's talking one-on-one with senators here and bringing more people into the conversation — more students, more seniors, more scientists, all of us who care about the future of this country," she said.

We could use more people like Elizabeth Warren in both major political parties in all levels of government because bettering the lot for the ordinary American should be our #1 priority.

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Last week a giant in American literature died – **Amiri Baraka**, influential African American writer and firebrand, dies in his hometown of Newark, New Jersey. *Amiri Baraka,* one of the most influential African American writers of his generation, who courted controversy as a poet, playwright and provocateur and who was a primary intellectual architect of the Black Arts movement of the 1960s, died Jan. 9 at a hospital in Newark. He was 79. Mr. Baraka began writing in the 1950s under his original name, ***LeRoi Jones***, as a poet and jazz critic on the fringes of Beat Movement in Greenwich Village. He later became a disciple of Malcolm X and an advocate of a militant black separatist movement built around African American cultural traditions, racial pride and defiance.

He courted controversy throughout his life, first with confrontational plays in the 1960s, including *"Dutchman"* and *"The Toilet,"* that portrayed racial misunderstanding and violent encounters in explicit language. Closely identified with the rising Black Nationalist movement of the 1960s, he later moderated his views and became an avowed Marxist. Yet he remained an unrepentant and polarizing symbol of radical indignation. *"We want poems that kill,"* he wrote in *"Black Art,"* an influential 1965 poem that helped define the Black Arts movement. *"Assassin poems. Poems that shoot guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys . . . setting fire and death to whities . . . "*

In a 1984 review of Mr. Baraka's "The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones" in **The Washington Post,** novelist John Edgar Wideman summed up his protean place in American culture: *"Savior, clown, artist* [redacted] *sold out to demagoguery, hero, menace."* As much as anyone, Mr. Baraka helped define a modern, militant sense of self-identity and empowerment among African Americans seeking to break free of white cultural and social norms. The title of his 1967 one-act play became a catchphrase of the time: *"Arm Yourself or Harm Yourself."* In 1965, he founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre in Harlem, [redacted]., which received funding from the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity. When OEO Director R. Sargent Shriver Jr. tried to visit the cultural center, Mr. Baraka barred him at the door. *"I don't see anything wrong with hating white people,"* Mr. Baraka told **U.S. News & World Report** at the time. *"Harlem must be taken from the beast and gain its sovereignty as a black nation."*

Mr. Baraka's forthright use of black vernacular, slang and profanity in an improvisatory style became an influence on later writers, hip-hop musicians and playwrights. Arnold Rampersad, the biographer and literary critic, once wrote that Mr. Baraka's bold writings, coupled with his vibrant social activism, made him one of the most historically significant figures in African American life, alongside Frederick Douglass, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison. *"More than any other black poet,"* Rampersad wrote, *"he taught younger black poets of the generation past how to respond poetically to their lived experience, rather than to depend as artists on embalmed reputations and outmoded rhetorical strategies derived from a culture often substantially different from their own."*

Mr. Baraka's detractors considered him a reckless agitator whose inflammatory rhetoric contained elements of anti-Semitism and misogyny and constituted a reverse form of hate speech. In 2002, cultural critic Stanley Crouch ridiculed Mr. Baraka's writing as *"an incoherent mix of racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, black nationalism, anarchy and ad hominem attacks relying on comic book and horror film characters and images that he has used over and over and over."* In later years, Mr. Baraka continued to issue incendiary pronouncements, including the poem *"Somebody Blew Up America,"* written soon after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

In the poem, he maintained that Israeli and U.S. leaders had advance knowledge of the attacks. After reciting a litany of wrongs committed against the poor and powerless, Mr. Baraka wrote: *"Who knew the World Trade Center was gonna get bombed / Who told 4,000 Israeli workers at the Twin Towers / To stay home that day / Why did [Israeli Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon stay away?"* The passage was widely condemned as anti-Semitic and factually untrue and led to a public outcry to have Mr. Baraka fired from his $10,000-a-year position as poet laureate of New Jersey. *"I will not apologize, I will not resign,"* Mr. Baraka said.

The state's governor at the time, James McGreevey, discovered that he didn't have the authority to dismiss Mr. Baraka. The legislature eventually passed a measure to abolish the post of poet laureate. His lawsuit against state officials was ultimately turned down by the U.S. Supreme Court. In a wry moment of self-promotion, Mr. Baraka said, *"No poet laureate has ever made poetry this famous."*

Everett LeRoy Jones was born Oct. 7, 1934, in Newark. His father worked for the post office, and his mother was a social worker. He attended Rutgers University in New Jersey and Howard University without getting a degree and began to go by LeRoi Jones. He then served in the Air Force, which he found an alienating experience, marked by racial prejudice and conformity to rules he could not abide.

By the mid-1950s, he landed in Greenwich Village, where he befriended poet Allen Ginsberg, a fellow Newark native, and other writers of the Beat Movement. He soon gained a following for his own poetry and writings on jazz. After writing several volumes of poetry, Mr. Baraka published *"Blues People: Negro Music in White America"* (1963), which placed black musical traditions in the broader social context of African American life.

In 1964, he wrote several short plays, most notably *"Dutchman,"* that challenged accepted views of black-white relations. In *"Dutchman,"* which won an Obie award for best off-Broadway play, a bohemian white woman and a well-dressed black man have an encounter on a subway that ends in violence. After the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, Mr. Baraka said he *"began to focus on my own identity."* He divorced his first wife, Hettie Cohen, with whom he had two children, moved to Harlem and later to Newark. In the late 1960s, he adopted the name Amiri Baraka.

Mr. Baraka became a tenured professor at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and taught at many other colleges, including George Washington University. In 1980, he published an essay in the Village Voice in 1980, *"Confessions of a Former Anti-Semite,"* in which he renounced the overt anti-Semitism of some of his writings from the 1960s. But he hardly retired from the cultural battlefield. He quarreled with prominent black mayors of Newark, including Kenneth Gibson and Cory Booker, and in the early 1990s had a well-publicized dispute with director Spike Lee, then making a film about the life of Malcolm X. He feared the effort would be tainted by the money and tastes of Hollywood. *"Who appointed Baraka chairman of the African American arts committee?"* Lee retorted. "Nobody tells him what poems and plays to write, so why is he trying to tell me what kind of film to make?"

Mr. Baraka's survivors include his wife of 47 years, Sylvia Robinson, who later changed her name to Amina Baraka; two daughters from his first marriage and four children from his second, including Newark city council member Ras Baraka. Amiri Baraka's daughter Shani and her companion were killed in 2003; the ex-husband of Shani's sister was later convicted of the murders. Mr. Baraka's writings became more fragmented over the years, but he earned good reviews with his collected poems, *"Transbluency,"* in 1995 and with his 1984 autobiography. In that book, he described his early life and seemed to come to reluctant terms with the world around him. *"I realized,"* he wrote, *"that the U.S. was my home. As painful and complicated as that was."*

Having first met Amiri Baraka in the 1960s in Greenwich Village and later in Harlem when a friend of mine was working with him I like to describe him as a cross between *Prince and Huey Newton with the artistic swagger of Archie Shepp* because like most young men who realized that they possessed a type of genius the was difficult and opinionated and would make outrageous comments to satisfy his own self-interest. But much like Prince, he had a special gift that was undeniable. I am told that after moving back to Newark in the late 60s/early 70s he played an instrumental part in helping Ken Gibson become Newark's first black mayor and finally ridding the city of the corrupt politicians who had run the New Jersey's largest city for decades. And in his 70s even though he had mellowed a bit he maintained the swagger to the end. Whatever his faults, Amiri Baraka was one of the most important literary voices of his generation whose contributions changed the world for us all..... Please see Margalit Fox's **New York Time**'s obituary: [redacted]
playwright-dies-at-79.html?emc=eta1

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One of the *big uglies* in America is the growing economic inequality which last week the Editorial Board of the New York Times focused on, as it is now bordering on a national embarrassment, that in the richest country on the planet tens of millions of Americans live in poverty with the Middle-Class being squeezed more and more as the rich are taking a larger and larger slice of the country's economic pie. With this said, I invite you to read the editorial below.

No Jobs, no benefits and lousy pay.

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD: January 10, 2014

There is nothing good to say about the December employment report, which showed that only 74,000 jobs were at last month. But dismal as it was, the report came at an opportune moment. The new numbers review the Republican arguments that the jobless benefits be not be renewed, and that the current minimum wage is adequate. At the same time, they are the score of the need, only recently raised to the top of the political agenda, to combat poverty and inequality.

The report showed that average monthly job growth in 2013 was 182,000, basically unchanged from 2012. Even the decline in the jobless rate last month, from 7 percent in November to 6.7 percent, was a sign of weakness: It mainly reflects a shrinking labor force - nothing new hiring - as the share of workers employed are looking for work fell to the lowest level since 1978. That's a tragic waste of human capital. It would be comforting to ascribe when the dwindling labor force mainly to retirements or other long-term changes, but most of the decline is due to weak job opportunities and weak labor demand since the Great Recession.

One result is that the share of jobless workers who have been unemployed for 6 months or longer has remained stubbornly high. In December, it was nearly 38 percent, still higher by far than at any time before the Great Recession, and the records going back to 1948.

And yet, nearly 1.3 million of those long term unemployed had their federal jobless benefits abruptly cut off at the end of last year, after Republicans refused to renew the federal unemployment program and the latest budget deal. Each week the program is not reinstated, another 72,000 jobless people who otherwise would have qualified for benefits will find that there is no longer a federal program to turn to. Worse, in the Senate this week, after a showing of willingness to discuss renewing the benefits, .Republicans objected to a bill to do just that. They had demanded that a renewal be paid for, but they didn't like how Democrats proposed to do that - with spending cuts at the end of the budget window in 2024 in exchange for relief today.

There was no need to pay for the benefits, which have a crucial and positive effect - on families, the economy and poverty - that it would be sound to renew them even if the government barn to do so. But Republicans would rather criticized President Obama's handling of the economy then help those left behind.

A similar dynamic is developing around the drive for a higher minimum wage. In December jobs report, the average hourly wage for most workers was $20.35. That means that the minimum wage, at $7.25 an hour, is one-third the average, rather than one-half, as was the case historically. Raising the wage to $10.10 an hour, as Democrats have proposed, with help to restore the historical relationship. But even that would fall far short of the roughly $17 an hour that workers at the bottom of the wage scale would be earning increased labor productivity were reflected in their pay, rather than in corporate profits, executive compensation and shareholder return.

Republicans, however, are opposed to any increase, as if the numbers don't speak for themselves. Their stance also dismisses research, and common sense, which says that raising the wages of low and moderate income workers is essential for lessening both poverty and inequality.

Instead, in the past week, they have introduced ostensibly "antipoverty" ideas, most prominently Senator Marco Rubio's plan to transform federal safety net programs into state block grants, another of the shopworn Republican ideas that include privatizing federal services and slashing domestic spending. Block grants have allowed States to disregard the needs of the least fortunate. The proposal would set that the debate on wages, poverty and inequality. The December jobs report is telling Congress what it needs to do. Unfortunately, that will not lead to action anytime soon.

THIS WEEK's READINGS

Last week while researching an article on Alzheimer, I came across a reference in **The Atlantic Magazine** by Jonathan Rauch – ***The Hospital Is No Place for the Elderly*** – that sparked my interest having spent three stays in the Intensive Care Unit in two hospitals in Los Angeles over the last six plus years, as well as witnessed several elderly friends try to hang on to life, at great suffering only to carve out several more months, and those last months were spent in hospitals, away from family and often at great expense. I also remember witnessing my own mother who fifteen years ago, decided that she no longer wanted to live even though modern medicine could have kept her alive possibly for another two to three years. And I wonder about the Jahi McMath's family in Oakland, CA who insisted on keeping her alive even though a slew of medical specialist have concluded that she is *brain-dead*. But back to my initial premise, maybe hospitals are not the best place for the elderly especially in last stage/stages of life when medical treatment for aging chronically ill patients is costly and often ineffective.

Rauch's article centers around Brad Stuart who in 1976 in his third year of medical school at Stanford, doing his first clinical rotation witnessed a supervising oncologist order an extremely toxic chemotherapy for a elderly patient with advanced lymphoma. The patient is feeble and near death, his bone marrow eviscerated by cancer. The supervising oncologist has ordered a course of chemotherapy using a very toxic investigational drug. Stuart knows enough to feel certain that the treatment will kill the patient, and he does not believe the patient understands this. Like a buck private challenging a colonel, he appeals the decision, but a panel of doctors declines to intervene. Well, Stuart thinks, if it must be done, I will do it myself. He mixes the drug and administers it. The patient says, “That hurts!” A few days later, the man’s bed is empty. What happened? He bled into his brain and died last night. Stuart leaves the room with his fists clenched. To this day, he believes he killed the patient. “I walked out of that room and said, ‘There has got to be a better way than this. ” “I was appalled by how we care for—or, more accurately, fail to care about—people who are near the end of life. We literally treat them to death.”

Here is a puzzling fact: From 1970 until 2009, spending on health care in this country rose by more than 9 percent annually, creating fiscal havoc. But in 2009, 2010, and 2011, health-care spending increased by less than 4 percent a year. What explains the change? The recession surely had something to do with it. But several recent studies have found that the recession is not the whole story. One such study, by the Harvard University economists David Cutler and Nikhil Sahni, estimates that *“structural changes”* in our health-care system account for more than half of the slowdown. In a sense, Brad Stuart is one of those changes. He is a leader in a growing movement advocating home-based primary care, which represents a fundamental change in the way we care for people who are chronically very ill. The idea is simple: rather than wait until people get sick and need hospitalization, you build a multidisciplinary team that visits them at home, coordinates health-related services, and tries to nip problems in the bud. For the past 15 years, at Sutter Health, a giant network of hospitals and doctors in Northern California, Stuart has devoted himself to developing home-based care for frail, elderly patients.

For years, many people in medicine have understood that late-life care for the chronically sick is not only expensive but also, much too often, ineffective and inhumane. For years, the system seemed impervious to change. Recently, however, health-care providers have begun to realize that the status quo is what Stuart calls a *"burning platform"*: a system that is too expensive and inefficient to hold. As a result, new home-based programs are finally reaching the market, such as one launched about five years ago at Sutter, called Advanced Illness Management. *"It's much more feasible now to make a program like this work than it was a few years ago." "There are a lot of new payment schemes in the pipeline that are going to make this kind of program much easier to support."* This is good news. Generalizing from a small sample is always perilous, but if what is happening at Sutter is any indication, a more humane, effective, and affordable health-care system is closer than we think.

The problem that home-based primary care addresses has been well understood for years. Thanks to modern treatment, people commonly live into their 70s and 80s and even 90s, many of them with multiple chronic ailments. A single person might be diagnosed with, say, heart failure, arthritis, edema, obesity, diabetes, hearing or vision loss, dementia, and more. These people aren't on death's doorstep, but neither will they recover. Physically (and sometimes cognitively), they are frail. Joanne Lynn, the director of the Altarum Institute's Center for Elder Care and Advanced Illness, says that this *"frailty course,"* a gradual and medically complicated downslide, was once exceptional but is now the likely path for half of today's elders. Seniors with five or more chronic conditions account for less than a fourth of Medicare's beneficiaries but more than two-thirds of its spending—and they are the fastest-growing segment of the Medicare population. What to do with this burgeoning population of the frail elderly? Right now, when something goes wrong, the standard response is to call 911 or go to the emergency room. That leads to a revolving door of hospitalizations, each of them alarmingly expensive. More than a quarter of Medicare's budget is spent on people in their last year of life, and much of that spending is attributable to hospitalization. *"The dramatic increase in costs in the last month of life is largely driven by inpatient hospital stays,"* Helen Adamopoulos recently reported on [redacted] *"On average, Medicare spends $20,870 per beneficiary who dies while in the hospital."*

Hospitals are fine for people who need acute treatments like heart surgery. But they are very often a terrible place for the frail elderly. *"Hospitals are hugely dangerous and inappropriately used,"* says George Taler, a professor of geriatric medicine at Georgetown University and the director of long-term care at MedStar Washington Hospital Center. *"They are a great place to be if you have no choice but to risk your life to get better."* For many, the worst place of all is the intensive-care unit, that alien planet where, according to a recent study in the Journal of the American Medical Association, 29 percent of Medicare beneficiaries wind up in their last month of life. *"The focus appears to be on providing curative care in the acute hospital," an accompanying editorial said, "regardless of the likelihood of benefit or preferences of patients."* Taler can attest to one of the more peculiar elements of this situation, which is that a better model—namely, providing care and support at home—has been known and used for decades. Taler himself pioneered an interdisciplinary house-call model in Baltimore in 1980, and in 1999 he co-founded a home-based primary-care program at Washington Hospital Center that has served almost 3,000 people. In the 1970s, the Veterans Administration (now the Department of Veterans Affairs) began building a home-based primary-care program, which now operates out of nearly every VA medical center and serves more than 31,000 patients a day. This is not newfangled, untested stuff.

Home-based primary care comes in many varieties, but they share a treatment model and a business model. The treatment model begins from the counterintuitive premise that health care should not always be medical care. In Sutter's Advanced Illness Management program, known as AIM, each patient is assigned to a team of nurses, social workers, physical and occupational therapists, and others. The group works under the direction of a primary-care physician, and meets weekly to discuss patient and family problems—anything from a stroke or depression to an unexplained turn for the worse or an unsafe home.

Rauch sat in on several of these team meetings. A social worker and a nurse talked over a case and decided they needed to make a home visit together; a doctor suggested a medication change; the various members of the group compared notes on one patient's hospitalization while discussing whether another's 911 call might have been averted. Strikingly, patients were presented not as bundles of syndromes—as medical charts—but as having personal goals, such as making a trip or getting back on their feet. The team tries to think about meeting patients' goals rather than performing procedures. An advantage of the multidisciplinary approach is that over time, as clients' conditions change, the group can recalibrate the mix of services and providers, to avoid jarring transitions. *"Once in AIM, always in AIM,"* one coordinator told a patient's family. Over several years, a person might move from independence and occasional social-worker visits to hospice care and finally death, all within AIM, and mostly at home. Sutter figures that the program, by keeping patients out of the hospital whenever possible, saves Medicare upwards of $2,000 a month on each patient, maybe more. The VA, for its part, says its program reduces hospital days for its patients by more than a third and reduces combined costs to the VA and Medicare by about 13 percent.

But now we come to the business model, which has been problematic. For doctors, nurses, health systems, and insurers, providing in-home service costs money. Medicare pays for hospitalization, but it does not pay for much by way of in-home care, or for social workers, or for time spent coordinating complex cases and traveling to homes and talking with caregivers. Where in-home primary care has existed, it has tended to be a foundation-funded experiment, or a charitable project, or part of a vertically integrated system like the VA, which can capture any savings. The home-care program at Washington Hospital Center runs at a 30 percent loss. Meanwhile, hospitals lose "heads in beds," and therefore revenue. Medicare—which is to say, taxpayers—may save money, but it has no mechanism either to track savings or to pay providers and insurers for hospitalizations that do not happen. This is why Brad Stuart was frustrated for so many years. He could see the path forward, and others could see it, but it was blocked. Today, though, he's feeling optimistic. The path is clearing.

The elderly flock to Phoenix, Arizona. Not surprisingly, the city is home to one of the country's biggest nonprofit hospice organizations, Hospice of the Valley. Better than most people in the medical system, hospice providers understand the trouble with hospitals. In the early 2000s, Hospice of the Valley began experimenting with an in-home program designed to bridge the frailty gap—that is, the gap between hospital and hospice . That experiment led to the development of a team-based approach in which nurses, nurse-practitioners, social workers, and sometimes physicians visit clients' homes, provide and coordinate care, and observe people outside the context of the medical system. *"That face time is what makes the program work,"* David Butler, Hospice of the Valley's executive medical director, told the author. Butler says that for the 900 people it serves, the program decreases hospitalizations by more than 40 percent, and ER visits by 25 to 30 percent.

Though the program collects whatever payment it can from Medicare and private insurance, it operates at a loss, and is run as a community service and a form of [redacted] . But things have changed recently. Insurance companies and other providers have begun asking Hospice of the Valley to contract with them to pick up their caseloads of high-cost, chronically ill patients. At the beginning of this year, the program was earning enough in reimbursements to cover one out of seven patients; today the rate is more like one in three. That is still not enough, but when a few more big contracts come through, Butler says, perhaps in a year or 18 months, enough of the patient base will be covered to tip the program into the black. This would have been impossible a few years ago. Most people saw in-home care as too expensive and logistically complicated even to think about—and in any case, no one would pay for it. So what's happened?

A few things, not least among them the Affordable Care Act. Under the new health-care law, Medicare has begun using its financial clout to penalize hospitals that frequently readmit patients. Suddenly, hospitals are not so eager to see Grandma return for the third, fourth, or fifth time. Obamacare has also earmarked money specifically to test new care models, including home-based primary care. Thanks to a $13 million Medicare innovation grant, for example, Sutter is rolling out Advanced Illness Management to its entire health network, to test whether the program can be scaled up. If the results of such tests are good, that would provide impetus—and of course, the very fact that Medicare is investing in the experiment signals its interest. Perhaps most important, Obamacare is changing the business calculus by creating alternatives to fee-for-service payment. It is beginning to set up new provider networks and payment schemes that let health systems and insurers share in what they can save by preventing unneeded treatment (while also requiring them to shoulder some of the risk of cost overruns). Those reforms are still fledgling, and too technical to garner public attention amid the ballyhoo over insurance mandates and the like, but they have already begun to reinforce what people in the geriatrics world tell me is a change in the culture of health care. *"The idea of cost avoidance is no longer categorically rejected,"* Butler says.

Stuart speaks of a new receptiveness among health systems' financial executives, at Sutter and elsewhere. *"A few years ago, you couldn't get a new idea across the desk of a CFO unless it generated revenues. If all you could do was save money, it was like, forget it."* Now, he says, CFOs want to hear about savings, because they expect the old sources of revenue—more treatments with more gadgets at higher costs—to dry up. Jeff Burnich, a vice president at Sutter, told me that the business case for AIM is only getting stronger. *"Most health providers, if not all of us, lose money on Medicare, so how we make up for that is, we cost-shift to the commercial payers."* But the space for cost-shifting is shrinking. *"The way you bend the cost curve now is by focusing on where there's waste and inefficiency, and that's the end of life in the Medicare population."* He expects to see a wave of hospitals fail in coming years if they don't provide better value. *"The music has stopped,"* he said, *"and there are five people standing, and one chair."*

Switching to a home-based model of primary care will be a challenge. Medicare, a bureaucratic behemoth designed in the 1960s, moves slowly and will need a lot of time to adjust. Physicians, a notoriously self-important lot, will need to see themselves as part of a team in which a nurse or a social worker often takes the lead. Nurses will need to see hospitalization as a last rather than a first resort. Patients will need to learn that home care can be as good as hospital care, often better. None of this will happen fast.

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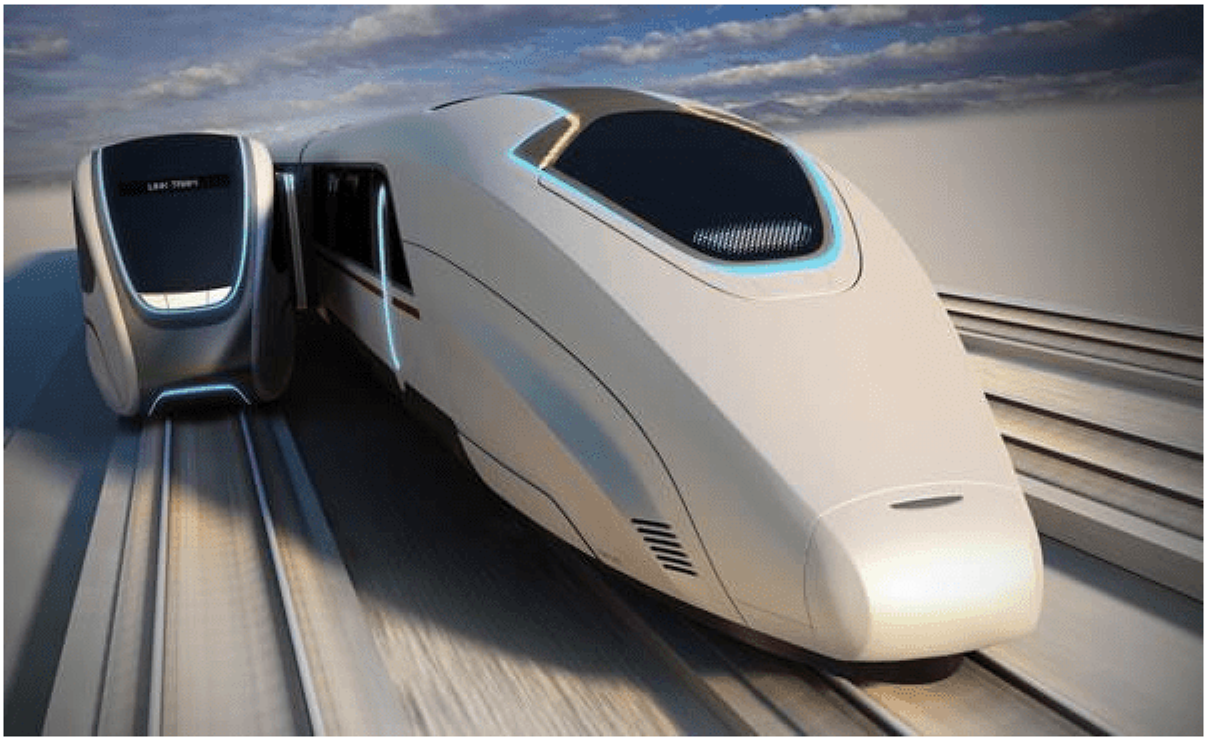

Last week while surfing the net in search of content for my Weekly Readings I came across an article on the **MSN** web news site by Rob Clymo – ***Japan to build incredible floating train in America*** – suggesting that commuters in the US could soon be enjoying a whole new kind of high speed rapid transit system between cities similar to those in Europe and Asia. The link between Washington DC and Baltimore is one such example, but if the Japanese have their way then commuters could soon be buzzing by magnetic train between the two locations in just 15 minutes. In a move that will have workers on this side of the pond going green with envy, a plan has been hatched that could see a super-maglev train design being used to whisk workers from A to B at similarly super speeds. And it's all down to the ever-enterprising Japanese, who have offered to chip in and pay half the cost of the new rail link in a bid to showcase this incredible feat of engineering.

Over in Japan, rail companies are currently hard at work testing their increasingly sophisticated super-maglev's. The most recent model, the futuristic Series L0 offering, will be capable of speeds in excess of 300 miles per hour and, thanks to an incredibly aerodynamic structure, will be able to shave off substantial amounts of journey time between the likes of Tokyo and Nagoya. Regular domestic services using these mind-blowing creations are pencilled in for 2027. Meanwhile, if it gets rubber-stamped and the green light to go, the Japanese/American collaboration could be operational on the east coast of the States within the next decade. It's a bold move, but the ever-enterprising Japanese people clearly know that this would give them a huge and very high-profile platform to sell the super-maglev concept, both to other congested parts of the United States and around the world too.

In a separate proposition CBS News in Dallas reported that a proposed high speed rail line between Dallas to Houston in 90 minutes is moving closer to reality as Texas Central High-Speed Railway, a private company, along with the Federal Railroad Administration have agreed to conduct an environmental impact study of a high-speed rail line between the two major Texas cities, with a second environmental impact study will look at extending the high-speed rail line from Dallas to Fort Worth, with a stop in Arlington. The estimated $2 Billion for the Dallas to Fort Worth section will likely come from federal funds, while Texas Central High-Speed Railway would pay for the line to Houston with no tax dollars. "They have $10 Billion to build high-speed rail from downtown Dallas to downtown Houston," said Michael Morris, the North Central Texas Council of Governments Director of Transportation. "Our interest, of course, is we need to get all the way to Fort Worth." Morris said federal funds could be secured for the project in the next couple years with completion of the project in 8 to10 years.

Morris said the private/public collaboration makes the project appealing for the U.S. Department of Transportation but added it's a massive undertaking. "This is equivalent to building a DFW International Airport so there's a lot of work that has to go into it," said Morris. "It's not going to happen tomorrow." Stephanie Kreiling, who commutes from Weatherford to Dallas nearly every day for work, said she can't wait for a high-speed rail line connecting Fort Worth and Dallas. The trip between the two cities would take 20 minutes. "Where do I sign-up?" Kreiling asked. "It would give me back several hours that I lose per week commuting as far as I do."

You would think that everyone would be on board in Texas and elsewhere but in my home state California, highly popular Governor Jerry Brown is facing a fire storm as critics are trying to undermine a 520 mile high speed train line between San Francisco and Los Angeles projected to cost $68 billion, reducing the 6 hour car journey to less than 2 hours and 40 minutes.

12 countries currently have high speed rail with another eight countries in the process of developing high speed train lines. Today commuters travel from downtown London to downtown Paris in 2 hours and 20 minutes via the Eurostar which is less time than making the same trip via air travel. Today high speed rail travel has gone from 120 mph when it was introduced in Japan in 1964 to 358 mph by the French TGV with commuters traveling at more than 200 mph between European and Asian cities on a regular basis.

Japanese High Speed Bullet Train - BBC Documentary **Web Site:** http://youtu.be/nPLx9j-bBHo

WORLDS FASTEST TRAINS - MAGLEV "capable" of 3,500 km/h **Web Site:** http://youtu.be/aIwbrZ4knpg

The world's great powers have long declared themselves through their rail lines—think the 20th Century Limited, the Flying Scotsman, or the Orient Express—and on June 30 the Chinese made their bid for supremacy, with the first official run of a $32 billion high-speed line between Shanghai and Beijing. Faster (820 miles in 288 minutes) and sleeker than any other, the needle-nosed CRH380A symbolizes China's accelerating pace, even as it faces questions about safety, and taps into an ancient rivalry with Japan. Simon Winchester was on board.

America's railways are the mirror image of Europe's. Europe has an impressive and growing network of high-speed passenger links, many of them international, like the Thalys service between Paris and Brussels or the Eurostar connecting London to the French and Belgian capitals. These are successful—although once the (off-balance-sheet) costs of building the tracks are counted, they need subsidies of billions of dollars a year. But, outside Germany and Switzerland, Europe's freight rail services are a fragmented, loss making mess. Repeated attempts to remove the technical and bureaucratic hurdles at national frontiers have come to nothing.

Amtrak's passenger services are sparse compared with Europe's. But America's freight railways are one of the unsung transport successes of the past 30 years. They are universally recognised in the industry as the best in the world. Their good run started with deregulation at the end of Jimmy Carter's administration. Two years after the liberalisation of aviation gave rise to budget carriers and cheap fares, the freeing of rail freight, under the Staggers Rail Act of 1980, started a wave of consolidation and improvement. Staggers gave railways freedom to charge market rates, enter confidential contracts with shippers and run trains as they liked. They could close passenger and branch lines, as long as they preserved access for Amtrak services. They were allowed to sell loss making lines to new short-haul railroads. Regulation of freight rates by the Interstate Commerce Commission was removed for most cargoes, provided they could go by road.

Before deregulation America's railways were going bust. The return on capital fell from a meagre 4.1% in the 1940s to less than 3% in the 1960s. In 1970 the collapse of the giant Penn Central caused a huge shock, including a financial crisis. By 1980 a fifth of rail mileage was owned by bankrupt firms. Rail's share of intercity freight had slumped to 35% from 75% in the 1920s. Tracks were neglected and fell into disrepair, leading to a downward spiral of speed restrictions and deteriorating service. The term "standing derailment" was coined to describe the toppling-over of stationary freight wagons when the track gave way beneath their wheels.

Several factors had combined to bring about this sorry state of affairs. Services and rates were tightly regulated. Companies were obliged to run passenger services that could not make a profit. And road haulage received a huge boost from the building of the interstate highway system, which began in the late 1950s. Although this was supposed to be financed by taxes on petrol and diesel, railmen saw it as a form of subsidy to a new competitor, the nationwide trucking industry. In a neat twist, the poor condition of today's highways and the lack of public money for repairs have tilted the competitive advantage back to a rejuvenated rail-freight industry.

Giving the railroads the freedom to run their business as they saw fit led to dramatic improvements. The first result was a sharp rise in traffic and productivity and fall in freight costs. Since 1981 productivity has risen by 172%, after years of stagnation. Adjusted for inflation, rates are down by 55% since 1981. Rail's share of the freight market, measured in ton-miles, has risen steadily to 43%—about the highest in any rich country.

The $34 billion purchase in 2009 by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway of Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF), one of the seven main freight railways (see chart 2), opened many Americans' eyes to the industry's significance. That America's shrewdest investor should place his biggest bet on BNSF focused attention on how the country's railways have been quietly boosting the economy by sucking costs out of many supply chains.

Coal is the biggest single cargo, accounting for 45% by volume and 23% by value. More than 70% of coal transport is by rail. As demand grows for the lower-sulphur coal from the Powder River Basin in Wyoming, it has to travel farther. In response railroads have invested in more powerful locomotives to haul longer coal trains: since 1990 the average horsepower of their fleet has risen by 72%. Yet energy efficiency has also improved. Lighter, aluminium freight wagons, double-decker ones and more fuel-efficient locomotives have lifted the number of ton-miles per (American) gallon of fuel from 332 to 457—an improvement of 38%.

But the fastest-growing part of rail freight has been “intermodal” traffic: containers or truck trailers loaded on to flat railcars. The number of such shipments rose from 3m in 1980 to 12.3m in 2006, before the downturn caused a slight falling back. Behind this lies the tide of imports coming into the West Coast ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. A special rail expressway for freight, the Alameda Corridor, was opened in 2002 to link the ports to the big national rail routes, bypassing the 200 level crossings (grade crossings, in America) on the original branch lines that used to cause huge traffic jams on the roads as mile-long freight trains rumbled across. The corridor, one of the biggest infrastructure projects in modern America, was completed on time and on budget for $2.4 billion by a public-private partnership considered by many to be a model for other rail schemes, such as California's proposed high-speed passenger line.

Despite lots of investment—amounting to $460 billion since 1980, and equivalent to 40% of revenues in recent years—capacity constraints and rising fuel costs pushed up freight rates from 2003 until the onset of recession, since when they have levelled off. This has caused unhappiness among some coal companies which have no alternative means of transport. Although most American rail corridors involve two railroads covering the same origin and destination points, in reality competition is limited. Usually one route is more direct than the other, and if a mining company has sidings and a branch line linked to one railroad it cannot quickly and easily switch to another. Even so, American rail freight is among the cheapest in the world, costing less than half as much as in Japan or Europe. After adjusting for differences in purchasing power it is cheaper even than in China.

But the past ten years have seen another source of growth, as interstate highways have become clogged in places and have shown the effects of a lack of investment. Since one freight train can carry as much as 280 lorries can, railways can help to limit the rise in road congestion. Trucking companies such as J.B. Hunt have come to see the advantage of putting trailers on flat wagons for long-haul and using roads only for local pickup and delivery. This move was also spurred, according to Mr Phillips, by a shortage of lorry drivers. He says that tougher drink-driving rules and social changes have shrunk the numbers of “good ole boy” truckers inured to a life on the road. Most hauliers now suffer labour turnover of 100% a year.

Freight railways' very success is starting to create difficulties for them. The Department of Transportation estimates that many are already exceeding their theoretical capacity and are congested. It estimates that lots more investment will be needed, because capacity will have to rise by nearly 90% to meet forecast demand by 2035. The investment bill could rise yet more because of a change in the pattern of trade: in 2014 the Panama Canal opens a second lane, doubling its capacity and allowing it to carry bigger container vessels and bulk ships. Coming through to Gulf of Mexico and East Coast ports, these vessels will increase the need for better rail links inland.

In addition the freight railroads face a $15 billion bill for a new safety system to control trains on lines that also carry passengers or dangerous chemical cargoes. This system, Positive Train Control (PTC), is intended to stop or slow a train automatically if a driver goes too fast or passes a red signal. The bill to introduce PTC was signed by George Bush in 2008 only a month after a crash between a Metrolink commuter train and a Union Pacific freight train in California, causing 25 deaths and 135 injuries. The railway companies complain that only 3% of crashes are caused by the sort of human error that PTC is designed to avert and that claims that the system will improve efficiency on the network are unfounded. Whereas the FRA says that the new safety system will apply to only 65,000 miles (out of a total of over 140,000), the industry reckons it will cover more than half the network. The railways are seeking tax breaks and other subsidies to reduce the cost of complying.

But as a nation we have to see past the monetary success of one segment of transportation, when passenger travel is as important as freight and when technology advances in high speed rail could lead to advances in other segments, in addition to making the country more competitive. For a period n the 1990s I lived in Paris and commuted to London weekly via Eurostar, because it was much easier, cheaper and more efficient than traveling via planes. And having commuted between New York, Washington DC and Boston on a regular basis in the 1970s, for me the advantage of a high speed rail corridor is a new brainer. To not invest in high speed rail is akin to not supporting the expansion of the transcontinental rail road in the United States or the highway system. Finally, if only for one reason, JOBS, we as a country should embrace and support high speed rail across America. Again, we have to start thinking about what is good for the country, instead of pursuing self-interest at the cost of innovation.

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Last week Steven Rattner, a long-time Wall Street financier who led the restructuring of the auto industry in 2009 as counselor to the Treasury secretary under the Obama administration wrote in an op-ed in the **New York Times** – ***America in 2013, as Told in Charts*** – Looking back on 2013, many of the economic and political themes seemed familiar: a weak economy. Growing income inequality. Gridlock in Washington. Partisan wrangling over fiscal policy. But others, like the disastrous rollout of the Affordable Care Act HealthCare.gov website and the government shutdown, were new or at least revivals. To illustrate what happened Rattner presented 10 charts covering the first year of President Obama's second term:

1. Economic trends of recent years continue in 2013 – particularly the diverging fortunes of the rich and everyone else — but in some ways they accelerated. The stock market, as measured by the Standard & Poor's index, was up a stunning 32 percent (through Dec. 27). Corporate profits rose to a record $2.1 trillion. Meanwhile, incomes remained nearly flat and jobs tallies grew slowly. Through Oct. 30, earnings were up just 1.4 percent, an even smaller increase than in 2012. The only relative bright spot for the average American was housing; thanks in part to the aggressive efforts by the Federal Reserve to hold down interest rates, sale prices of homes were up by 13.3 percent in September, compared with a year earlier.

2. Economic growth — a likely increase in gross domestic product of just 1.8 percent in 2013, after adjusting for inflation — was also unbalanced in other ways, particularly the impact of the government. The nation's quickly falling deficit (it dropped from $1.09 trillion to $680 billion in a single year) cost dearly in economic activity. Spending by cash-strapped consumers and investment by skittish businesses both grew at slightly below customary rates. A flat-lining Europe dented President Obama's pledge to double American exports by 2015. On the other hand, home building and related residential activity, depressed since the onset of the financial crisis, provided a second annual lift to the economy.

3. Employment remained an overarching problem. While job growth has picked up steam in the last few months, the fall's higher pace of job creation – around 200,000 per month – would still not be nearly enough to bring unemployment down to pre-recession levels. According to calculations by the Brookings Institution's Hamilton Project, even if the 200,000 jobs per month rate were maintained, the unemployment rate would not fall to the November 2007 level of 4.7 percent for another five years.

4. Not only has the job recovery been sluggish, but also a disproportionate number of those that have been created have been in lower wage occupations, such as retail clerks and fast-food workers. And that trend is projected (by the Bureau of Labor Statistics) to continue; using a simple average, the 10 job categories expected to add the most jobs during the current decade boasted a collective median wage of $32,386 in 2010, roughly $15 per hour and far below the United States median of $51,892 at the time. Seven of the 10 categories pay below this average. Note the conspicuous absence of manufacturing; it may be recovering, but it isn't what is driving new jobs.

5. Wage increases haven't been paltry because the efficiency of the American worker has flagged; indeed, productivity has continued to chug along. But those productivity gains have simply not been passed on to workers. Between 2000 and 2012, productivity rose by 22 percent while wages increased by 7.7 percent. The divergence was particularly great over the last three years of that period – productivity up 4.6 percent and real wages down 1.1 percent. For this failure of the American worker to be rewarded for his growing output, blame a variety of factors, perhaps most important, globalization, which has allowed companies to move production to whatever part of the planet offers the lowest cost labor. In that respect, American workers remain in a race to the bottom.

6. The troubles with the Affordable Care Act's HealthCare.gov rollout sure grabbed daily headlines this fall. But throughout the commotion, little mention was made of the most fundamental aspect of the law: the way in which it raises nearly $2 trillion over the next decade — mostly from wealthy individuals and health care providers — and uses the money to fund the largest expansion in insurance coverage since Medicare was created nearly 50 years ago. As shown above, the end result should be better health care options for those closer to the bottom end of the income scale, through the Medicaid expansion and creation of exchanges with subsidies for most participants. The intended result: 25 million fewer uninsured Americans. Yes, this is redistribution on a grand scale, and we should all be very proud of it. But as evidenced by Obamacare's consistently poor poll numbers, most Americans are not feeling charitable toward the less well off.

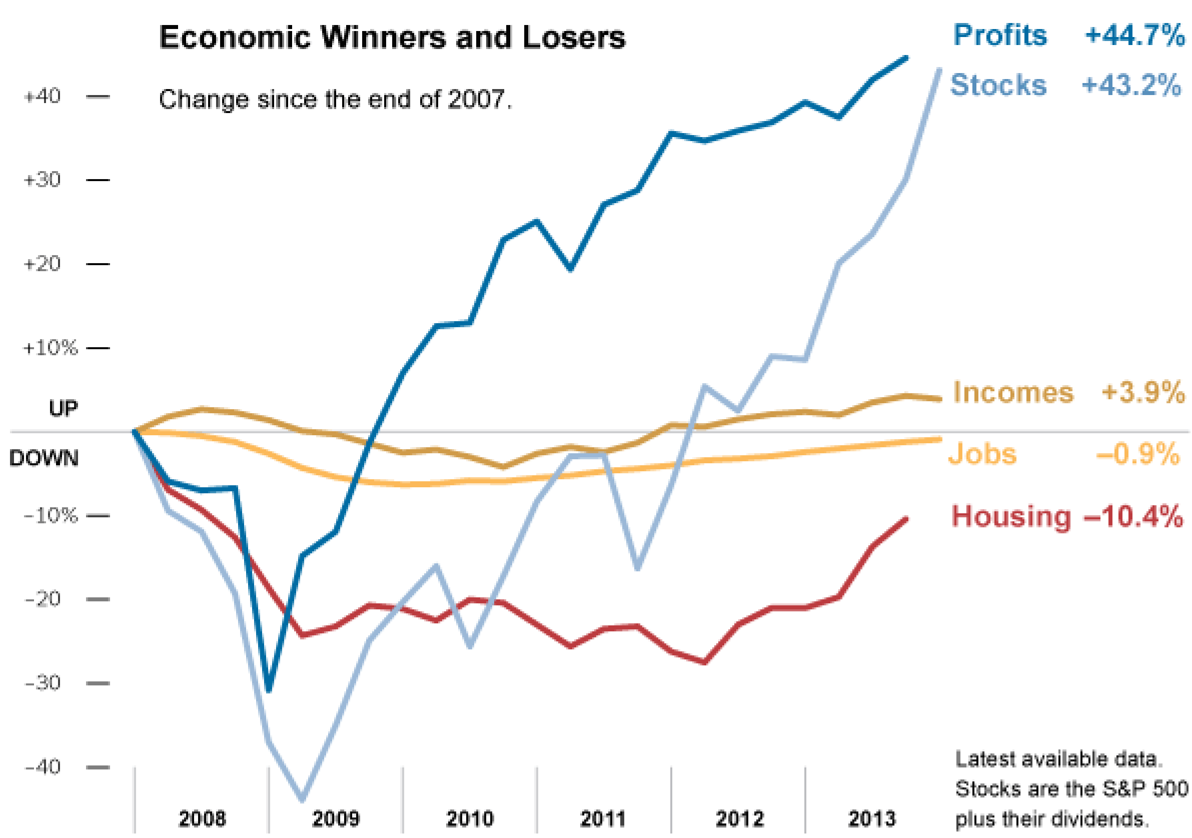
7. Trust in many American institutions has been declining, but few institutions have fallen so far out of grace as Congress. Last year, I showed that the previous Congress was the least productive Congress in modern times, including the famous Do-Nothing Congress of 1947-48, passing just 238 laws, 37 percent of the average of the 32 Congresses that preceded it. In 2013, the first year of this Congress, the number of new laws passed fell further, to 55 (as of Nov. 30), seven fewer than during the same period in 2011. As a result, Congress now stands dead last in approval rating among key American institutions – far below other braches of government, below news outlets, below banks and even below big business.

8. Congress well deserves that poll standing, in significant part because of the damage that it has done to the federal budget. The combination of Republican determination to cut spending and Democratic insistence that none of the entitlement programs (such as Medicare and Social Security) be meaningfully affected has resulted in the utterly inane policy of starving key domestic programs, including education, infrastructure and research and development. The recent budget fight and subsequent agreement did nothing to change that trajectory. As shown by the red line above, all that

resulted was avoiding the worst two years of forced budget cuts to these programs; for the 10 years beginning in 2008, this important spending will rise slightly in nominal numbers but will fall by 5 percent, after adjusting for inflation.

9. The dysfunction in Washington has taken its toll in other important ways. Not only has business confidence been shaken, but each new political battle has also been terrifying for consumers. Back in the summer of 2011, when the United States had its AAA credit rating removed by [redacted]. after it flirted with default, consumer confidence recorded the second biggest two-month drop ever, behind only the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. A smaller decline occurred at the end of 2012 when Congress nearly went over a fiscal cliff. Beginning this past July, consumer confidence dropped to its lowest level in nearly two years as a result of the government shutdown, the A.C.A. problems and related battles. Now, a two-year budget nearly in hand, Americans' moods seem to have improved. At a time when we need consumers to spend (prudently), these periods of faltering confidence have real economic consequences.

10. In contrast to the mood in most of the country and the still slow economy, Silicon Valley is partying again, albeit not quite like 1999. The Facebook initial public offering in May 2012 helped usher in a resurgence of excitement among investors for anything that looks like a sexy new high-tech service. This year's poster child [redacted]. was Twitter, which set a new record of one kind among recent major technology [redacted].'s: its valuation of more than 28 times its revenues. That didn't daunt investors; the stock promptly more than doubled and now trades at 65 times revenues. (Of course, there are no profits.) *To see all of the charts please see the attached article.*



Sources: Bureau of Economic Analysis; Bloomberg; Sentier Research; Bureau of Labor Statistics; Case-Shiller

What is depressing is to think Obama will be blamed for everything that "went wrong", with no mention of the way he was sabotaged by Republicans and their ilk at every turn, plus a label of "a depressing first year of Obama's second term". More depressing it is to see how so many Americans love to batter a decent man for their own political gain and to keep the status quo so their greediness can be satisfied. This is no way to act in a democratic society. Friends in other countries weep for you.

June Beeby – Kingston, Ontario Canada

While should not come as a surprise to anyone with the ability to reason, these charts starkly confirm what we already know: that the greatest wealth redistribution in American history has occurred over the past thirty years. Corporations, the wealthy, and their political allies have managed to tag any governmental action that doesn't enrich them as socialism, while filling their own pockets to the point where even the 19th century's "robber barons" would be embarrassed.

The ironic element to this is that it is the common folk who have-- in a political sense-- made this possible by voting against their own interests time and again. When working people resent unions, people with defined benefit pensions, money spent on public education and infrastructure investment, immigrants, and affordable health care for all of their fellow citizens then you know that we have truly entered the era of Bizarro America where down is up, truth is falsehood, and war is peace.

But thank the lord that taxes can't be raised on those most able to afford them and who have benefited the most from the wealth redistribution policies of our times. It's apparently better to pass the burden down to our undereducated, underemployed children rather than demand that the policies that have resulted in the economic imbalances demonstrated by these charts are brought to an end-- now. Not in five years, not in ten years, not in fifty years, but now.

DGP – Oneonta, NY

Would like to see some graphs that reflect the Republican Party's contribution to the poor economic performance. What has been the impact of not continuing unemployment insurance? What has been the impact of not raising the minimum wage? What has been the impact of contributing to the failure of the ACA without making any effort to provide almost universal coverage to the population? Why not legislation that provides an avenue for immigrants to become citizens? On and on!!

George Gluck – New Jersey

Mr. Rattner appears to confuse quantity with quality when attributing the public's displeasure with Congress to the smaller number of laws passed. I would suggest that passing more inane statutes that are so enormous that they are unable to be read and understood by the Congress (much less the general public) is a lot less important than perhaps streamlining the regulations that are already in force, and deleting the unending loopholes that are custom written and inserted into all of the voluminous laws being passed. I would rather see fewer more concise laws passed.

BL – Potomac, Md

Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Some momentum on the minimum wage could develop into a real impact on income inequality. The Affordable Care Act would have had many, many glitches no matter what; it will take some time to sort them out but we should all end up ahead. The Tea Party is in a defensive crouch and even Congress shows signs of realizing they are going to have to do better. We are talking to Iran and shaking hands with Cuba, and very slowly extricating ourselves from various western Asia and Middle East civil confrontations, forcing them to sort things out themselves, as they must eventually. I'm not an optimist but where there is change there is opportunity.

Robert York – New York City

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If there is a list that you would try to keep your company off, it is Douglas A. McIntyre's list of – ***The 10 Most Hated Companies in America*** – published last week by **24/7 Wall Street** that was later picked up (re-published) by other media outlets and platforms across the country and around the world. Contained are the obvious suspects as they are often the subject of ridicule by late night comics and the blogosphere, so how did **K-Mart** not make this list? And why is **Blackberry** on it, especially when I was a loyal *"crackberry"* user for more than 15 years until I transitioned to the ***Samsung S4*** last fall.... I still miss the keyboard, but then any smartphone maker who didn't realize that a companion tablet would become as important as the phone itself, maybe shouldn't be in the business..... As for ***lululemon***, I thought that it was a trendy competitor to **Jamba Juice**, since yoga isn't my thing. By the way who still shops at ***JC Penny***? And if **WalMart** is so hated how come it is the largest retailer on the planet without real competitors? I grew up looking at the **Sears & Roebuck** catalog like every day was the night before Christmas, how did **Sears** miss the boat that **Amazon** caught? With this said, if you have the time please enjoy the list below and for more information please feel free to review the entire article by McIntyre to see which companies that you would have added to the list.

These are the *10 most-hated* companies in America.

1. McDonald's

McDonald's (NYSE: MCD) was at the center of the most significant labor movement of 2013. The company has, between its owned and operated stores and franchises, hundreds of thousands of employees who earn barely more than the minimum wage. A recent study conducted by the National Employment Law Project (NELP) found that McDonald's employees rely more on public assistance programs than any other large fast-food company, with an estimated $1.2 billion in costs to the public. Making matters worse, McDonald's advised some of its employees to sell their possessions to make-up for holiday spending debt. Recently, the fast food chain's hotline designated to help its workers live on their modest incomes encouraged employees to apply for food stamps. Low wages may be why the fast-food giant scored just 73 in the American Customer Satisfaction Index, the lowest in the limited service restaurant.

2. Abercrombie & Fitch

Long-time Abercrombie & Fitch (NYSE: ANF) CEO Michael Jeffries is often referred to as the *"modern founder"* of the decades-old clothing line. But he became the subject of controversy when comments he made in 2006 about who the company wishes to see as its core customers recently surfaced. The comments implied that the teen retailer is looking to attract what he refers to as the *"cool* *kids"* and aims to avoid overweight customers. Still, he has the backing of the board. In response to an attempt by activist shareholder group Engaged Capital to force him out, the board gave Jefferies a new contract. Between the loud music and shoddy goods, if you have been in a A & F store lately you have to wonder how it is still in business. But then maybe I am not a *"cool kid."*

3. Electronic Arts

Leading game maker EA (NASDAQ: EA) has recently hit some serious roadblocks. The company's highly anticipated SimCity reboot was by all accounts a public relations disaster. The game servers failed to function for nearly a week after the launch, which meant consumers couldn't play the game for a week after they purchased it. The company eventually offered a free game to anyone who had purchased SimCity in the early days. One of the free games offered was Mass Effect 3, another release that tarnished the company's brand. Critics and gamers widely criticized the ending of the third installment of this very successful game as unsatisfying. The backlash was so severe that the company eventually released a free alternate ending. And there may be more troubles ahead. EA is having problems with yet another bug-filled launch, the fourth installment of the Battlefield franchise. On top of this, investors are suing the company for allegedly making misleading statements about the game's launch and overstating its success. It's perhaps not surprising then that, once again, The Consumerist labeled EA the "Worst Company in America" last year — the first company ever to earn the dubious distinction two years in a row.

4. Sears Holdings

Sears Holdings (NASDAQ: SHLD) is the parent corporation of retailers Sears and Kmart — both notorious underperformers. Investors have lost trust in controlling shareholder and chairman Eddie Lampert, whose poor management and decision-making has caused the company to shrink. Only 17% of the company's workers approved of Lampert's performance, according to Glassdoor. Sears was also ranked among the worst companies to work for last year, according to an analysis of Glassdoor data by 24/7 Wall St. Employees rated it a 2.5 out of 5, among the lowest marks awarded to a company of that size. This may be why the ACSI gave Sears a lower customer service score than every retailer in the industry, except for Walmart. As is the case at many of the country's largest retailers, Sears and Kmart are among the largest employers of low-wage workers in the country, according to analysis by 24/7 Wall St. in collaboration with NELP.

5. DISH Network

Subscribers aren't impressed with DISH's (NASDAQ: DISH) customer service. DISH earned a spot in MSN's 2013 Customer Service Hall of Shame largely because of its aggressive sales tactics. Customers also complained about confusing contracts and unreasonable cancellation fees. DISH is not the only company in the industry that customers despise, however, it reaps additional notoriety because of its relationship with its employees. Based on a 24/7 Wall St. analysis of Glassdoor data, DISH was rated as the worst company to work for last year.

6. Wal-mart

Like McDonald's, Walmart (NYSE: WMT) bore the brunt of the labor protests around raising the minimum wage last year. The company employs more workers who make less than $10 per hour than any company in America, according to an analysis by 24/7 Wall St in collaboration with NELP. While the company reports that its U.S. workers make an average of $12.81 an hour, this does not include part-time hourly wages. According to Glassdoor, Walmart sales associates, who are often part-time hourly employees, earn less than $9.00 an hour, on average. Further, only half of the store's employees approve of the CEO. Customers were less satisfied with service at Walmart in 2012 than at any competing chain. Possibly as part of an effort to stem employee dissatisfaction and deflect negative media attention, the world's largest retailer promoted 35,000 part-time workers to full-time status.

7. JPMorgan Chase

JPMorgan Chase (NYSE: JPM) has been embroiled in several major scandals in recent years. In 2012, the company captured headlines with the so-called "London Whale" fiasco, in which a series of trades cost it billions of dollars. As a result, the company's management and its risk controls were criticized. Yet, as 2013 wore on, the scandals continued piling up. In October, the company agreed to pay a $13 billion settlement related to its actions — and those of acquisitions Bear Stearns and Washington Mutual — in off-loading poor quality mortgage-backed securities onto investors. JPMorgan also became the focus of a scandal in China and Hong Kong, where it reportedly hired the children of Chinese elites to help facilitate the bank's business in China. The new year has also started off poorly for the bank, which was fined for ignoring signs that Bernie Madoff was running a ponzi scheme. The mounting negative press has led many to call for CEO Jamie Dimon's residentation.

8. lululemon

lululemon was once one of the world's most-promising retail companies. However, it has fallen on hard times. Shares are down nearly 20% in the past 12 months, compared with the S&P 500's 25% increase. lululemon was once the only game in town for yoga wear, clothing that has become extremely popular in the last few years. But larger clothing brands have begun eating away at the company's market share. Shares are down more than 15% since the company cut its outlook for the fourth quarter and fiscal year in mid-December. The company was embroiled in several public relations fiascos last year. After customers began complaining that one style of the company's pants were see-through in certain conditions, lululemon issued a recall. The problems might have ended there had the company's Chairman Chip Wilson not mentioned on television that the pants might not work on women of all sizes. In the ensuing fallout, Wilson resigned.

9. BlackBerry

The long and tragic decline of BlackBerry is a good example of how quickly a market leader can go astray. The grandfather of the smartphone industry has lost almost all of its market share to current leaders Apple and Samsung. As recently as 2008 the company was one of the largest sellers of smartphones in the world, with total unit sales more than double those of Apple. Since then, however, the company's share of the mobile phone market has evaporated. BlackBerry shares dropped by nearly 30% over the past year, while the S&P 500 gained more than 25%. Revenue in the third quarter was approximately $1.2 billion, down 56% from the year before. The company recorded revenue from 1.9 million smartphones in the period, compared to 6.9 million in the same quarter of the previous year, and the company lost $4.4 billion in the quarter. In contrast, Apple sold 33.8 million iPhones in its last reported quarter. BlackBerry launched two new phones last year in a last-ditch effort to field a competitive product. Unfortunately, consumers ignored the Z10 and Q10, prompting the company to announce it was cutting one-third of its staff and taking an inventory write-down of roughly $960 million in its fiscal second quarter.

10. JCPenney

JCPenney has probably made more operational and strategic mistakes than any other large publicly traded company in America. Penney hired Apple's retail chief Ron Johnson in November 2011 to replace longtime CEO Mike Ullman. Johnson implemented a series of marketing and merchandising strategies that not only failed to boost revenue but actually hurt sales — same-store sales and revenue fell roughly 25% in fiscal 2012. Same store sales failed to meet modest expectations in 2013. The company then rehired Ullman as CEO in April 2013, despite his poor performance before Johnson joined. Since returning, Ullman has announced plans to reverse most of Johnson's changes. Because of its sales failures and poor balance sheet, Penney is considered by many to be teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. The stock market has ravaged the stock, pushing down shares by 60% over the last five years. JC Penney has also done poorly in the critical e-commerce sector. In the Foresee study of online retail customer satisfaction, Penney only saving grace is that it can claim that you might have a better shopping experience than at K-Mart.

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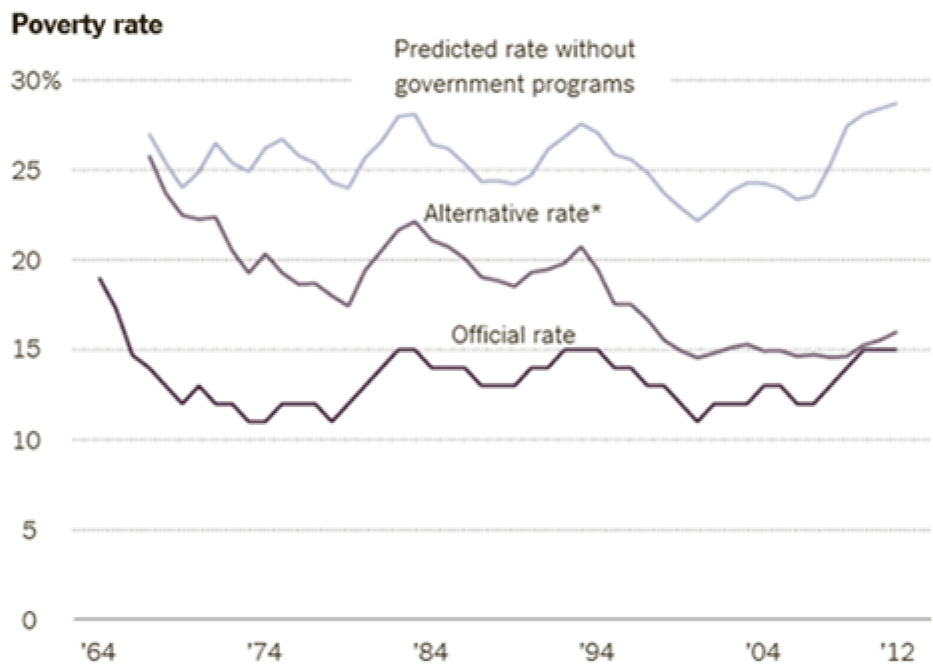
Conservatives in American like to say that the **War on Poverty** which was enacted under President Lyndon Johnson fifty years ago failed. That instead of providing a hand-up, the social safety net programs are simply hand-outs pushing the poor into the economic mainstream beyond their contribution and participation. Not only is this misleading it is false. First, the largest expansion of poor support outside of health care has been the Earned Income Tax Credit, a wage subsidy that has been shown to not only reduce poverty significantly (by 10 million in 2012), but is also a strong work incentive. Moreover, research that follows poor children into adulthood finds that benefits like the EITC and even nutritional support have lasting impacts that improve key outcomes--health, high-school completion, employment and earnings--later in life. To view these programs as *"handouts"* misses the fact that they act more like investments in the lives of many of their recipients.

This week in **The Huffington Post**, Jared Bernstein wrote the article – ***The Conservative Response to the War on Poverty Discussion -- So Far*** – He starts out his article; I'm finding some of the responses by conservative politicians, economists, et al to the War on Poverty discussion to be interesting and revealing. There's a lot of silliness, and worse, of course. I'd assign the Reagan quip *("we fought a war on poverty and lost")* to that category, as well as the misleading $20 trillion talking point (see this Mike Konczal piece out today on this). But once they get past the canned stuff, there's some interesting substance. Progressives have largely been pointing out that, in fact, rigorous analysis shows both significant and even lasting progress against poverty, amidst steep remaining challenges. The anti-poverty effectiveness of the programs developed and expanded before and since the **War on Poverty** is easily seen in figures like the one I reprint below, showing the increased divergence between pre-transfer and post-transfer poverty rates (the figure also shows the increasingly irrelevant official rate, which leaves out a lot of what we've done to reduce poverty). Yet the fact remains that 16 percent remain poor.

We have to wonder why Conservatives believe that reducing taxes is the solution for everything. They keep trotting out the notion of means testing as a way to address social security and other programs, which will lead to them being undercut as less and less people are covered. Then you hear Sen. Marco Rubio talking about how we need more worker training while he is supporting Rep Paul Ryan's House budget, which achieves 60 percent of its steep spending cuts from low-income programs, including training budgets. What else is on the R's anti-poverty agenda?:

--Tax reform: There seem to be two broad ideas here, one of which has a lot of merit. The first is the old supply-side canard about how lower marginal tax rates will boost growth and jobs, etc. This is not a serious proposal.



But after presenting a bit of the ole' supply-side catechism in this piece from a few days ago, former GW Bush administration economist Glenn Hubbard acknowledged that supply-side elixir *"...is insufficient for increasing the inclusion of low-wage workers, whose incomes may not benefit fully from economic growth."*

Hubbard goes on to endorse a smart idea that I've heard from numerous others in his camp: expand the Earned Income Credit to adult workers without kids. While the annual credit for working families with kids averages between $2-3,000, the one for childless adults averages less than $300.

Now, Hubbard et al want to trade this expansion for the elimination of the minimum wage, so the idea...um...needs a bit of work. But the EITC part is a good reform that would incentivize work and lower poverty.

--Block grants: Just wrap up all the damn poverty programs into one big package and dump 'em all on the states. OK, maybe that's not quite how they'd put it, but this is a pretty sure-fire recipe to surgically extract the critical countercyclical function of the safety net. I explain here, with disapproving reference to Sen. Rubio's float of this idea last week.

--Other stuff: Here's a review of how what some conservatives are thinking about in this space, including standard issue stuff--deregulate (e.g., less professional licensing), sub-minimum wage, more marriage--and some less standard ideas, including helping those with criminal backgrounds get back into the workforce. Many conservatives also support access to pre-school for disadvantaged kids.

So, nothing exceptionally path-breaking here, but it's a good conversation, and I'm struck by some conservatives' interest in raising the EITC for adult workers without kids. That would be a real advance. And yes, it's all rhetoric in a climate where little can move forward and budgets--on both sides--often fail to match rhetoric. In fact, a good question for a later post is what the Democrats' agenda for poverty reduction. There is a lot of interest from the admin and the Democrats on extended UI, a higher minimum wage, and, in terms of boosting mobility, the president's universal pre-school program. All good ideas -- a good start; but as Jared Bernstein points out *"full employment"* not on the list. Nor is the other costs of poverty that can’t be measured in numbers.

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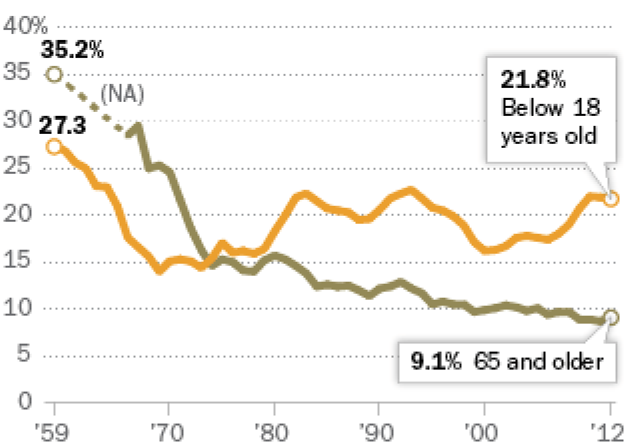
This week the **PEW Research Center** published an article by Drew Desilver – ***Who's poor in America? 50 years into the 'War on Poverty,' a data portrait*** – which was a the set of social programs enacted in 1964-1965 came to be called, was arguably the most ambitious domestic policy initiative since the Great Depression. But for decades, politicians and social scientists have argued about whether Johnson's antipoverty programs have lifted people out of destitution, trapped them in cycles of dependency, or both enacted under President Lyndon Johnson after he used his first State of the Union address to urge *"all-out war on human poverty and unemployment in these United States."*

Critics note that the official poverty rate, as calculated by the Census Bureau, has fallen only modestly, from 19% in 1964 to 15% in 2012 (the most recent year available). But other analysts, citing shortcomings in the official poverty measure, focus on a supplemental measure (also produced by the Census Bureau) to argue that more progress has been made. A team of researchers from Columbia University, for example, calculated an *"anchored"* supplemental measure — essentially the 2012 measure carried back through time and adjusted for historical inflation — and found that it fell from about 26% in 1967 to 16% in 2012.

What's inarguable, though, is that the demographics of America's poor have shifted over the decades. Here's a look at what has, and hasn't, changed, based on the official measure. Today, most poor Americans are in their prime working years: In 2012, 57% of poor Americans were ages 18 to 64, versus 41.7% in 1959.

Poverty Rates for Children and Elderly

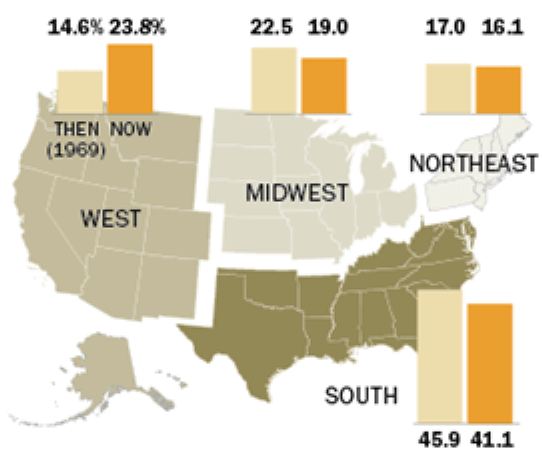


Source: Census Bureau

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The Geography of America's Poor

Percent by region of total U.S. below poverty line



Source: Census Bureau

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Far fewer elderly are poor: In 1966, 28.5% of Americans ages 65 and over were poor; by 2012 just 9.1% were. There were 1.2 million fewer elderly poor in 2012 than in 1966, despite the doubling of the total elderly population. Researchers generally credit this steep drop to Social Security, particularly the expansion and inflation-indexing of benefits during the 1970s.

But childhood poverty persists: Poverty among children younger than 18 began dropping even before the War on Poverty. From 27.3% in 1959, childhood poverty fell to 23% in 1964 and to 14% by 1969. Since then, however, the childhood poverty rate has risen, fallen and, since the 2007-08 financial crisis, risen again.

Today's poor families are structured differently: In 1973, the first year for which data are available, more than half (51.4%) of poor families were headed by a married couple; 45.4% were headed by women. In 2012, just over half (50.3%) of poor families were female-headed, while 38.9% were headed by married couples.

Poverty regions Poverty is more evenly distributed, though still heaviest in the South: In 1969, 45.9% of poor Americans lived in the South, a region that accounted for 31% of the U.S. population at the time. At 17.9%, the South's poverty rate was far above other regions. In 2012, the South was home to 37.3% of all Americans and 41.1% of the nation's poor people; though the South's poverty rate, 16.5%, was the highest among the four Census-designated regions, it was only 3.2 percentage points above the lowest (the Midwest).

Poverty among blacks has fallen sharply: In 1966, two years after Johnson's speech, four-in-ten (41.8%) of African-Americans were poor; blacks constituted nearly a third (31.1%) of all poor Americans. By 2012, poverty among African-Americans had fallen to 27.2% — still more than double the rate among whites (12.7%, 1.4 percentage points higher than in 1966).

But poverty has risen among Hispanics. Poverty data for Hispanics, who can be of any race, wasn't collected until 1972. That year, 22.8% lived below the poverty threshold. In 2012, the share of Hispanics in poverty had risen to 25.6%. But the U.S. Hispanic population has quintupled over that time. As a result, more than half of the 22 million-person increase in official poverty between 1972 and 2012 was among Hispanics.

Fighting poverty is a complex equation and building social programs is part of that. It seems impossible to track exactly how much of the decrease in poverty has to do with the growth of the economy over the last 50 years and how much social programs have helped people get out of poverty as opposed to alleviating their poverty. Ultimately, one has to believe that education and access to opportunity is the cure-all, both growing the economy and creating opportunity. So then why are be cutting funding to education? Obviously Johnson's War on Poverty hasn't cured poverty but to suggest that it hasn't helped generations of Americans to prosper more than what they would have without these programs is a lie. And imagine what could have been if these programs had not been systematic gutted during the past three decades by supply-side economics agendas.

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In 2012, *connecticutie* posted her version of the ***GOP Rape Advisory Chart*** to help sort out all of the confusion about the wide variety of rape "flavors" that today's Republican Party seems so hell-bent on bringing to light. Many thought she did a fantastic job, but, given the latest entries into the "rainbow of rape flavors" yesterday and today by Richard Mourdock and John Cornyn, I decided to create a revised version that plays it straight--I'm just including the actual quotes themselves. Feel free to repost on FB, TW or wherever you wish. It is now January 2014 and many of these attitudes really haven't changed, so without further ado, I present the updated ***Republican Party Rape Advisory Chart***:

THIS WEEK's QUOTE

In response to the government officials around New Jersey Governor Chris Christie who felt no reluctance or shame to create a four-day traffic jam that hurt tens of thousands of innocent drivers so that they could teach a public official from another political party a harsh lesson.

In a serious day of high alert it didn't matter to them but they must be held accountable because no matter who's guilty or not we can't live in a nation where people are just collateral damage for political retribution.

Rev. Al Sharpton

BEST VIDEO OF THE WEEK

Bruce Springsteen & Jimmy Fallon: "Gov. Christie Traffic Jam" Update 'Born To Run' To Parody Chris Christie's Bridgegate

Chris Christie, a noted fan of **The Boss** (when he isn't sleeping through his concerts), probably won't love this. Last night on "**Late Night**," **Jimmy Fallon** and his guest **Bruce Springsteen** donned '80s-era Springsteen attire to parody the seminal New Jersey anthem, "***Born to Run."*** Except this time, the lyrics were devoted to the "*bridge-gate*" scandal surrounding Christie's apparently political closing of the George Washington Bridge, causing major traffic issues. This scandal has presented many unlikely things, but we didn't think Bruce growling "I really gotta take a leak!" over "***Born to Run***" would be one of them. (*Read the lyrics below the video.)*

Web Link: [redacted]

Jimmy:
In the day we sweat it out on the streets stuck in traffic on the GWB
They shut down the tollbooths of glory because we didn't endorse Christie

Sprung from cages on Highway 9
We got three lanes closed, So Jersey get your ass in line

Ooohhh, baby this Bridgegate was just pay back
It's a bitch slap to the state Democrats
We gotta get out but we can't,
We're stuck in Governor Chris Christie's Fort Lee New Jersey traffic jam.

[The real Springsteen walks out]

Bruce:
Governor, let me in, I wanna be your friend
They'll be no partisan divisions
Let me wrap my legs 'round your mighty rims
And relieve your stressful conditions

We've got Wall Street masters stuck cheek to cheek
With blue-collar truckers, and man I really gotta take a leak
But I can't
I'm stuck in Governor Chris Christie's Fort Lee New Jersey traffic jam

[*Guitar solo]*

1, 2, 3, 4!

Jimmy:
Highways jammed with pissed off drivers with no place left to go
And the press conference went on and on

Bruce:
It was longer than one of my own damn shows

***Jimmy**:*
Some day Governor, I don't know when
This will all end, but 'til then

Together:
You're killin' the workin' man.
Who's stuck in Governor Chris Christie's Fort Lee New Jersey traffic jam.

Whoa whoa whoa!
Whoa whoa whoa!

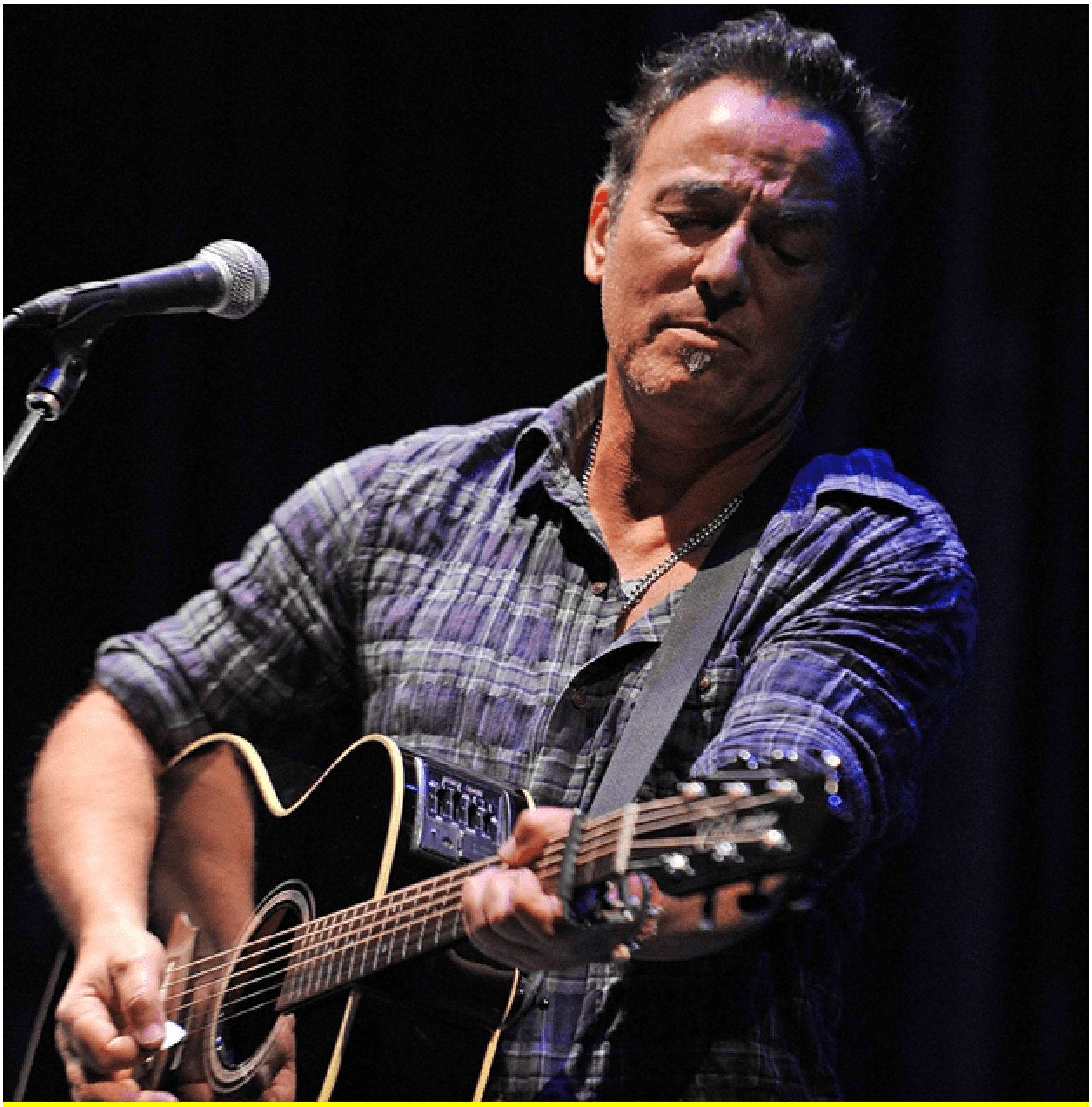
Bruce:
I gotta take a leak! I really gotta take a leak!

Together:
Down in Jersey land!

GREAT VIDEO MONTAGE

Web Link: [redacted]

THIS WEEK's MUSIC



As someone who first saw Bruce Springsteen play at ***Upstairs at Max's Kansas City*** and again when my friend Jae Mason opened for him on his first tour in Los Angeles but more importantly paying homage to *"bridge-gate"* this week I am feeling the music of one New Jersey's favorite sons **Bruce** *Frederick Joseph* **Springsteen** (born September 23, 1949) -- an American musician, singer-songwriter and icon. He is best known for his work with the E Street Band. Nicknamed ***"The Boss",*** Springsteen is widely known for his brand of poetic lyrics, Americana working class, sometimes political sentiments centered on his native New Jersey and his lengthy and energetic stage performances, with concerts from the 1970s to the present decade running up to an uninterrupted 250 minutes in length. Springsteen's recordings have included both commercially accessible rock albums and more sombre folk-oriented works. His most successful studio albums, Born in the U.S.A. and Born to Run, showcase a talent for finding grandeur in the struggles of daily American life; he has sold more than 64 million albums in the United States making him the fifteenth highest selling artist of all-time and more than 120 million albums worldwide. Springsteen has earned numerous awards for his work, including 20 Grammy Awards, two Golden Globes and an Academy Award as well as being inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1999. Please enjoy ***The Boss'*** music and please don't get angry with me if I haven't included one of your favorites....

Bruce Springsteen – ***Growing up*** (Max's Kansas City, NY 1972) -- http://youtu.be/7dy7RTicVro

Bruce Springsteen – ***Spirit in the Night*** -- http://youtu.be/XyB-L4Jbom4

Bruce Springsteen – ***Thunder Road*** -- http://youtu.be/eJ_HiY7LDGo

Bruce Springsteen – ***Rosalita*** -- http://youtu.be/CvoOmgE3FHo

Bruce Springsteen – ***Born To Run*** -- http://youtu.be/O2AVfWKlHpU

Bruce Springsteen – ***The Promised Land*** -- http://youtu.be/4c6KkP76slY

Bruce Springsteen – ***Racing In The Street*** -- http://youtu.be/IrxKkELQJiQ

Bruce Springsteen – ***Candy's Room*** -- http://youtu.be/Pku_NPaWTY8

Bruce Springsteen – ***She's The One*** -- http://youtu.be/Koogv4fLLnM

Bruce Springsteen – ***WHO DO YOU LOVE/ SHE'S THE ONE*** -- http://youtu.be/BRIj_yYMfWs

Bruce Springsteen – ***All That Heaven Will Allow*** -- http://youtu.be/TwBoY-m2PVw

Bruce Springsteen – ***Dancing in the dark*** -- http://youtu.be/sfkouMLhXqY

Bruce Springsteen – ***Born In The U.S.A***. -- http://youtu.be/lZD4ezDbbu4

Bruce Springsteen – ***Glory Days*** -- http://youtu.be/6vQpW9XRiyM

Bruce Springsteen – ***Jungleland*** -- http://youtu.be/tGUoz1DGO8E

Paul McCartney & Bruce Springsteen – ***I Saw Her Standing There*** -- http://youtu.be/kDAMRMQr48g

Saying Goodbye to Clarence Clemons "***The Big Man"*** - **NBC** Nightly News -- http://youtu.be/456baiiyLcs

I hope that you have enjoyed this week's offerings and wish you a great Martin Luther King Day and a wonderful week.....

Sincerely,

Greg Brown

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