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Subject: Greg Brown's Weekend Reading and Other Things.. 1/24/2016

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Inline-Images: image.png; image(1).png; image(2).png; image(3).png; image(4).png; image(5).png; image(6).png; image(7).png; image(8).png; image(9).png; image(10).png; image(11).png; image(12).png; image(13).png; image(14).png; image(15).png; image(16).png; image(17).png

DEAR FRIEND.....

Is Contaminated Drinking Water The New Norm?

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file:///Users/stephenbenson/Pictures/iPhoto%20Library.photolibrary/Masters/2016/01/23/20160123-234221/flintwater.jpg

As Steven Cohen recently wrote in the Huffington Post – Whenever I hear that environmental protection is a partisan issue, I'm reminded of New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia's famous statement that there is no Democratic or Republican way to pick up the garbage. The provision of clean air, safe drinking water, solid waste management and flood control are all basic public services that people who pay taxes expect to receive. Too bad the folks running Flint, Michigan, and the state of Michigan didn't get that memo. It's also too bad that the federal Environmental Protection Agency sat on the sidelines and allowed Michigan to damage Flint's water supply.

In the spring of 2014 to save money the city of Flint decided to stop using Detroit's water system and instead began pumping its water from the Flint River. This was a cost-cutting measure designed to be temporary until the city could connect to a regional water system, then under construction. By April, residents began complaining of cloudy, foul-smelling water, but were assured by local authorities that the water was fine. It wasn't. While the city has now switched back to the Detroit water system, the water from the Flint River damaged the city's water pipes and released lead and other pollutants from the pipes into the water supply. Had the state required corrosion protection chemicals to be added to the Flint River's water, the lead pollution might have been avoided, but the state agency neglected to impose this requirement. In order to use the public water system, in-home filters must now be used and changed frequently to ensure that the water is safe.



Inline image 2

On January 5, 2016 Michigan's Governor Rick Snyder declared a state of emergency regarding the water crisis in Flint, Michigan where, due to deliberately careless resource management, the number of kids with dangerous levels of lead in their blood doubled in 2015. Snyder's announcement follows Flint Mayor Karen Weaver's state of emergency declaration: she called the lead poisoning crisis a "*manmade disaster*" in December. Last week, President Obama signed a declaration stating that Flint is under a state of emergency and requiring the Federal Emergency Management Agency to provide funds for filters and other remedial actions. Unfortunately, since this is a human-made disaster rather than a natural one, the funding available is capped at \$5 million-although the cap could be raised by a specific though unlikely act by our dysfunctional Congress.

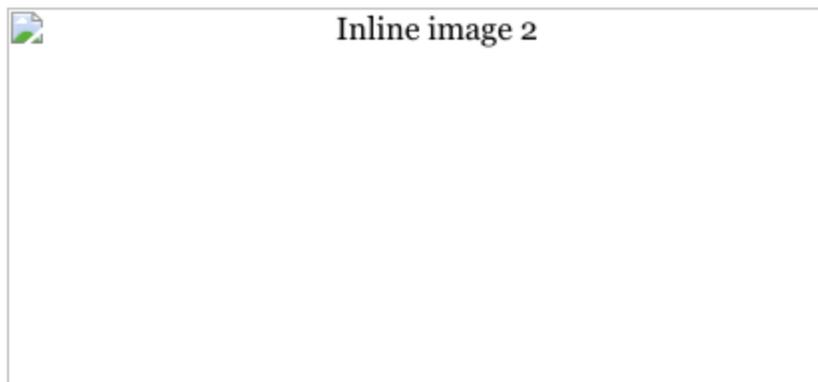
Financially, Snyder's declaration means Michigan state funds and recovery organizations will work with those in Flint to help out, according to Time, but exactly how the state will do so is unclear. Lead poisoning is no joke; neither are the side effects, which include skin lesions, hair loss, chemical-induced hypertension, vision loss, depression and anxiety. Elsewhere, the Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") is working with federal prosecutors to investigate the decisions that led to Flint's public health emergency. Flint citizens have filed a civil suit. The plaintiffs, on behalf of victims of high levels of lead, filed the suit against Gov. Rick Snyder, the city of Flint, and members of management of the Flint water authority.

In November, Gov. Snyder, the state of Michigan, the city of Flint and 13 additional public officials were named in a lawsuit brought by Flint residents say they knew about the lead poisoning but distributed the water anyway. Michigan's lead environmental regulator quit, and Snyder has apologized. At this point, apologies don't matter. Problems began when the people began getting water from the Flint River instead of getting it from Lake Huron via Detroit's water system. The move was announced as a temporary, cost-cutting measure until Flint could get Great Lakes water on its own, according to details in the class-action lawsuit. But then came residents' complaints about strangely colored tap water. This was followed by studies showing that lead piping elevated lead levels 10 times higher than they had previously measured. A local hospital discovered that the percentage of Flint children with elevated lead levels nearly doubled after the switch, according to CNN affiliate WDIV.

Flint is the largest city and county seat of Genesee County, Michigan. Located along the Flint River, 66 miles (106 km) northwest of Detroit, it is the largest city in the Flint/Tri-Cities region of Michigan. According to the 2010 census, Flint has a population of 102,434 and was founded as a village by fur trader Jacob Smith in 1819, Flint became a major lumbering area on the historic Saginaw Trail during the 19th century, and incorporated as a city in 1855. It later became a leading manufacturer of carriages and other vehicles earning it the nickname "*Vehicle City*". IN 1908 William Crapo Durant formed General Motors in Flint and after World War II, Flint became an automobile manufacturing powerhouse for GM's Buick and Chevrolet divisions, both of which were also founded in Flint. But when GM left Flint the city during the 2008 recession.

Federal officials began investigating the lead contamination of drinking water in Flint, Michigan, after the financially strapped city was under the control of a state-appointed emergency manager when it switched its source of tap water to the nearby Flint River in April 2014 from Detroit's water system to save money. Flint, about 60 miles (100 km) northwest of Detroit, returned to Detroit water in October after tests found some children had elevated levels of lead in their blood and lead was found in higher-than-acceptable levels in the water. Lead poisoning can cause learning disabilities and at high levels can lead to seizures and death, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Flint citizens have filed a civil suit. The plaintiffs, on behalf of victims of high levels of lead, filed the suit against Gov. Rick Snyder, the city of Flint, and members of management of the Flint water authority.

The complaints prompted a host of actions to address what was labeled a public health emergency. For instance, the city ordered public schools stop running water for taps and water fountains, according to WEYI, another CNN affiliate. Government agencies passed out over 6,000 water filters, said Michigan Department of Community Health Director Nick Lyon. The situation could affect the city for many years. In the city's state of emergency declaration, Flint Mayor Karen Weaver indicated that more funding will be needed for special education services because lead "*can cause effects to a child's IQ, which will result in learning disabilities.*" She also indicated that more funding will be needed for mental health services, "*an increase in the juvenile justice system,*" and that there would be a greater need for adoptive and foster parents "*as a result of social services needed due to the detrimental effects of the high blood lead levels.*"



Water pollution in America is not just limited to the city of Flint, state of Michigan or the Mid-West. Water pollution is the invasion of pollutants into any body of water two different means: point and non-point sources. Point sources are those pollutants that come from a single, recognizable source, such as chemicals dumped through a drainage pipe or a specific landfill. Non-point sources are pollutants that may not be traceable to any one particular source, but a collection of pollutants that collectively cause contamination. These sources are many, from sewage from households, nutrients from agriculture, radioactive waste and oil from industry, as well as biological sediment that builds in lakes, rivers and streams.

We simply must move past short-term expedience and the type of thinking that states: "in order to make an omelet you've got to break some eggs." We need to use our analytic, information and communication resources to do a better job of managing human impact on the environment. While this may raise some costs in the short term, it will lower costs in the long term. As we get better at managing our activities we will learn more about how to produce and protect simultaneously and the price of protecting the environment will go down.

All over the world, from China to India and from West Virginia to the city of Flint, Michigan, poor management is harming the environment, public health, and everyone's pocketbook. There are no short-cuts, and the sooner the people running our governments and businesses figure that out, the sooner we can proceed with the real work of growing our economy without destroying our home planet.

There are more than 54,700 water systems in the United States according to the EPA and since 2004 it is estimated that water provided to 49 million people has contained illegal concentrations of chemicals arsenic or radioactive substances like uranium as well as dangerous bacteria often found in sewage.

Regulators were informed of each of those violations as they occurred. Regulatory records show that fewer than 6% of the water systems that broke the law wherever found or punished by state or federal officials, including those of the EPA, which has ultimate responsibility for enforcing standards. Studies indicate that drinking water contaminants are linked to millions of instances of illness with them United States each year. Some incidences, drinking water violations one-time events, and probably pose little rest but for hundreds of other systems, illegal combination persisted for years, records show.

But the bottom line is that if we are not diligent, instead of being the exception, contaminated municipal drinking water could become the norm – especially while Congressional Republicans are currently trying to push forth legislation repealing the mandates of the Clean Water Act, forcing President Obama to veto their efforts to open up our natural waters to the machinations of their corporate backers.

Republicans, in general, have been nearly silent on the tragedy unfolding in Flint – with the exception of ghoulish opportunist and religious extremist Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX), who decided that showing a cursory concern for the victims of one of the largest mass poisonings in history might re-establish a shred of his "*Christian values*" credibility, which he has dragged through the mud with the undeniable truth that his most consistent political platform has been his own near-constant hypocrisy. Unsurprisingly, he turned the opportunity to really show some of the compassion and charitable spirit he claims to possess into a soapbox moment to rail against the failures of big government and implicitly blaming the President.

We must grudgingly give him credit for having the decency to at least acknowledge the fact that there is a public health disaster unfolding in Flint. Perpetual truant Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) opted to punt as his response, saying that he didn't know enough about it to comment. Republican front-runner Donald Trump also declined to comment on it, brushing it off as a "*shame*" but that he "*shouldn't be commenting on Flint.*" These cowards are working to be the next President of the United States – but refuse to acknowledge one of the biggest public health disasters in recent memory? It just goes to show how little the GOP cares for the average American or the health of our environment – all

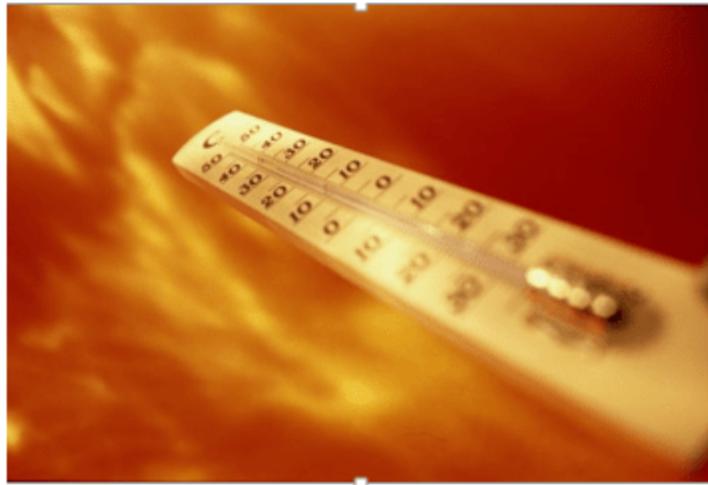
they do is complain about these rules that protect the health of our citizens are just “an *EPA power-grab*” that would hurt “*business*” and “*farmers*.”

It is absolutely despicable that such commonsense rules like those in the Clean Water Act in the light of Flint Michigan, have been met with such a wave of opposition from our right-wing politicians, who clearly have placed the interests of their corporate backers and their own pockets above the needs and the safety of the American people. It is even more deplorable that they would force our President to veto this obvious corporate handout barely a week after the news of lead poisoning in possibly thousands of children broke. It's like they aren't even pretending to care about us anymore. As for the situation in Flint, President Obama was absolutely right, "its inexcusable" and hopefully not the new normal....

So True



**NOAA Says 2015 Was Second Hottest Year On Record In U.S.
But it was The Hottest Year for the Planet**



Last year was the second hottest on record in the contiguous United States, and included 10 major weather and climate events, such as droughts and storms, that each led to over \$1 billion in damages, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said on Thursday. The average temperature in 2015 was 54.4 degrees Fahrenheit (12.4 degrees Celsius), compared with 55.3 F (12.9 C) in 2012, the warmest year recorded since the government started keeping records in 1895, NOAA said.

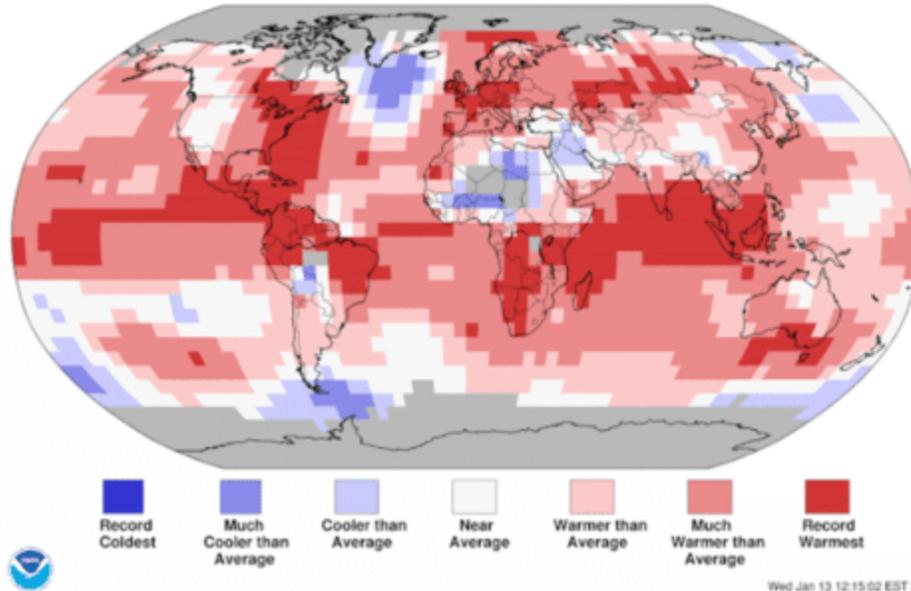
Much warmer than average annual temperatures were recorded across the West, including Washington state and Oregon, as well as in the Southeast, including Florida. It was also the third wettest year on record, with Oklahoma and Texas setting records for precipitation. There were 10 extreme climate and weather events in 2015 including storms, floods and a wildfire that each caused more than \$1 billion in damages, NOAA said. These events resulted in the deaths of 155 people.

Last November, the World Meteorological Organization said that 2015 would be the hottest on record globally, and 2016 could be even hotter due to the El Niño weather pattern. At the United Nations' climate summit in Paris last month, nearly 200 countries agreed to take steps to fight climate change, but whether their actions will achieve a goal of restraining a rise in temperatures to "well below" 2 C (3.6 F) above pre-industrial levels is uncertain.

Land & Ocean Temperature Percentiles Dec 2015

NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information

Data Source: GHCN-M version 3.3.0 & ERSST version 4.0.0



Globally averaged temperatures in 2015 shattered the previous mark set in 2014 by 0.23 degrees Fahrenheit (0.13 Celsius)," NASA reported. The previous hottest year, 2014, had an average global temperature of 58.24 degrees Fahrenheit. That was already 1.24 degrees above the 20th century average.

Though 2015 was the 19th straight year that the annual average temperature exceeded the 20th century average, according to NOAA, climate change has received scant attention on the presidential campaign trail among the Republican candidates. Ahead of the November election, Republican candidates have criticized President Barack Obama and leading Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton for posing climate change as a top national security issue, saying the assertion understates the threat of terrorism.

One of the charges by Republican Candidates is that cutting carbon emissions gives China and other countries a competitive advantages, except that this isn't true because "red alerts," smog-shrouded buildings in Beijing and elsewhere in China has caused its government to aggressively cut emission and on the whole, it appears to be gaining real ground in the war on pollution.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Grand Total	2015 vs all
Jan			90.2	44.8	119.1	197.9	117.8	107.6	113.9	94%
Feb		66.3	98.5	150.3	84.3	123.5	174.6	96.4	118.3	82%
Mar		80.6	96.2	59.2	96.7	125.2	110.5	88.7	94.3	94%
Apr	103.6	85.7	79.9	89.9	87.4	67.3	95.6	78.4	85.3	92%
May	98.5	84.1	86.9	65.3	91.4	85.1	72.1	60.2	80.3	75%
Jun	99.8	97.3	109.1	108.1	96.9	112.1	58.9	54.4	91.5	59%
Jul	89.9	105.5	123.6	107.6	80.6	69.0	88.7	55.0	90.0	61%
Aug	64.6	107.8	97.7	103.4	81.0	62.0	63.0	44.7	77.0	58%
Sep	59.3	108.4	120.9	95.6	60.1	90.6	70.9	47.1	80.0	59%
Oct	84.2	93.4	118.7	145.0	94.9	106.4	140.7	72.0	106.2	68%
Nov	73.2	154.6	137.5	110.3	87.3	91.3	104.9	124.3	114.0	109%
Dec		109.0	97.3	108.4	113.0	98.1	78.7	162.1	109.5	148%
Grand Total	84.9	101.7	104.2	99.0	90.7	101.9	97.7	82.5	95.7	86%

In 2015, Beijing saw a 16 percent annual fall in the concentration of the most deadly type of air pollutant, according to an analysis by the Paulson Institute and Greenpeace of air quality data from the United States Embassy in Beijing. Though virtually all of those gains were registered during the summer and early fall, they still proved enough to make 2015 the cleanest year since the embassy began publishing data in 2008.

But even with those improvements, the air in Beijing and much of eastern China remained extremely toxic. Studies have linked air pollution to shrinking life expectancy and over a million deaths each year. Beijing's average pollution levels in 2015 still put it well in the "unhealthy" range and far above international standards for acceptable air quality.

The decline in average levels also proved unable to prevent extreme pollution events -- "airpocalypses" -- that smothered the capital during November and December. Those haze events prompted Beijing authorities to issue their first-ever pollution "red alert" this year. Data from the United States Embassy in Beijing shows 2015 experiencing the worst November-December since measurements began in 2008.

2015's roller coaster quality -- the best summer and worst winter on record -- has prompted further questions over what led to soaring pollution levels in November and December. Anders Hove, associate director of research at the Paulson Institute, says that part of the blame can be placed on coal-fired winter heating. While crackdowns on polluting steel or cement factories may have accounted for blue skies during the summer, officials can't simply close down facilities that provided heating to residential areas in China's frigid north.

Beijing's average monthly concentrations of cancer-causing PM2.5 particulates in micrograms per cubic meter (note: not AQI levels) from 2008-2015. The data is from the United States Embassy pollution monitoring. Beijing's own environmental officials announced a more modest 6 percent improvement in air quality this year, a smaller margin that some analysts chalk up to Beijing's overly optimistic portrayals of pollution levels in 2014.



Those improvements were also mirrored across broad swaths of eastern China, with a Greenpeace population-weighted analysis of Chinese data showing 15 percent annual decreases in cancer-causing PM2.5 particles. A separate analysis by Berkeley Earth found an 8 percent year-on-year decrease across much of the country during April-November 2015, though the group cautioned that it was too early to call it a definitive trend.

Credit for those gains goes to falling demand for coal as Chinese heavy industry slumps, years of investment in renewable energy sources, and an increasingly robust policy framework for punishing polluters. China's economy has also slowed sharply as the country attempts to transition from export- and infrastructure-led growth to services and domestic consumption, a move that should bring further pollution reductions. Taken together, these changes may mark the first tentative victories since Chinese leaders declared a "war on pollution" in 2014.

As someone who remembers (25 years ago) driving down from my home on the top of Lookout Mountain in Los Angeles into the smog of the streets below and those wonderful orange sunsets fueled by the reflection of the air pollution and realizing that we no longer have "unhealthy" days, whether reducing climate change or pollution levels, both the state of California and the government of China has proven that decisive government policies can and does make a difference.

Being Less Crazy Than Donald Trump Does Not Make Marco Rubio 'Moderate'



He won his first race for political office at age 26 by beating an incumbent county commissioner. A year later he won a seat in Florida's state house by upsetting a local media celebrity. And in 2010 he won his Senate seat by beating a popular governor who was expected to coast to victory. So it's no surprise that on Monday April 13 Rubio declared his presidential candidacy, even though he trails badly in the early polls. If he wins the presidency, he would be the third youngest person ever elected president after Teddy Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. And if he loses, he will likely forfeit his Senate seat.

Marco Antonio Rubio was born on May 28, 1971 in Miami, Florida, the second son and third child of Mario Rubio and Oriales Rubio. His Cuban parents were nationalized in 1975 after immigrating to the United States in 1956, prior to the rise of Fidel Castro in January 1959. This father of four attended

Tarkio College in Missouri and Santa Fe Community College in Gainesville, Florida before graduating from the University of Florida with BS and the University of Miami Law School. A Roman Catholic, Rubio also attends Catholic and Southern Baptist services and formerly was a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

A starch advocate of “*limited government*” Rubio rose to power as one of the darlings of the Tea Party Movement. Like almost all Conservatives, Rubio supports lower taxes on corporations and the rich, and making Social Security changes to prevent projected future deficits in the program. As well as closing the federal Department of Education, expanding public charter schools and for teaching both creationism and evolution. He opposed efforts by the Obama administration to normalize political relations with Cuba, as well as opposed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action deal with Iran's nuclear program brokered by the Obama administration. Rubio also disputes the scientific understanding of climate change, arguing that human activity does not play a major role in global warming and that proposals to address climate change would be ineffective and economically harmful. And like all of the other GOP Presidential candidates, Rubio has stated that he would repeal and replace the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Yet somehow Marco Rubio is now being cast as one of the moderates in the 2016 Republican presidential primaries. But as Jonathan Chait recently wrote in *Daily Intelligencer*, “*Being Less Crazy Than Donald Trump Does Not Make Marco Rubio ‘Moderate’*.” On a recent swing through the most conservative parts of his state, Sen. Marco Rubio told a packed banquet hall at the St. Andrews Bay Yacht Club that major policy issues were threatening the American dream: onerous taxes, burdensome regulations – and, above all, President Barack Obama's health care law. Rubio even slammed President Obama for enacting laws to prevent convicted felons, terrorists and the mentally ill from obtaining firearms, how his be a moderate position?

On foreign policy, he has embraced full-scale neo-conservatism, winning enthusiastic plaudits from figures in the right-wing intelligentsia, like William Kristol. While much of the Republican Party has recoiled from the excesses of the Bush administration's wild-eyed response to the 9/11 attacks, Rubio has not. He was one of 32 senators to oppose the USA Freedom Act, which restrained the federal government's ability to conduct surveillance. He was one of just 21 senators opposing a prohibition on torture, insisting, “I do not support telegraphing to the enemy what interrogation techniques we will or won't use.” Indeed, Rubio now delights his audiences by promising to torture suspected terrorists, who will “get a one-way ticket to Guantánamo, where we're going to find out everything they know.”

On social issues, Rubio has endorsed a complete ban on abortions, even in cases of rape and incest (a stance locating Rubio to the right of George W. Bush). He has promised to reverse executive orders protecting LGBT citizens from discrimination and to appoint justices who would reverse same-sex marriage. The centerpiece of Rubio's domestic policy is a massive tax cut – more than three times the size of the Bush tax cut, and nearly half of which would go to the highest-earning 5 percent of taxpayers. By reducing federal revenue by more than a quarter, Rubio's plan would dominate all facets of his domestic program, which is otherwise a mix of conventional Republican proposals to eliminate Obamacare, jack up defense spending, and protect retirement benefits for everybody 55 and up. Rubio has voted for the Paul Ryan budget (“by and large, it's exactly the direction we should be headed”). He has proposed to deregulate the financial system, thrilling Wall Street. (Richard Bove, author of *Guardians of Prosperity: Why America Needs Big Banks*, wrote a grateful op-ed headlined, “Thank you, Marco Rubio.”)

What, then, accounts for Rubio's moderate image? One reason is the issues Rubio has chosen to emphasize. He has given far more attention to his plan to increase college affordability. As Rubio has said, "You'll hear me spend a tremendous amount of time talking about higher-education reform." This formulation perhaps gives away more than Rubio intends. Rubio's higher-education reform plan, while largely innocuous, is also minuscule in scale — a third-tier throwaway line in a State of the Union speech. A second reason is Rubio's ill-fated 2013 attempt to shepherd bipartisan immigration reform through Congress. Because of the prominence of his role in that episode, which consumed a large share of his brief tenure in national politics, Rubio's support for reform has disproportionately colored his public image. But his history provides no reason to believe the issue sits close to Rubio's heart. As a Senate candidate in 2010, Rubio forcefully opposed any path to citizenship as "amnesty."

In the wake of the 2012 election, after the Republican Party wrote a post-mortem calling for the passage of immigration reform and efforts to reach out to young people and minorities, Rubio loyally reversed his position and led the pro-reform charge, and initially he drew support from important figures in the party. But when restrictionists revolted against the bill, Rubio abandoned his own proposal and has promised never to support comprehensive reform again. The fairest conclusion to draw from his two reversals is that Rubio does not hold especially strong beliefs on the issue at all, taking whichever position seems to be the most effective means of advancing traditional Republican policies (for which he has displayed consistent support). Republican donors naturally adore Rubio.

While Rubio's willingness to sponsor immigration reform tells us very little about his convictions, though, it reveals a great deal about his political strategy. Rubio is a political pragmatist. And pragmatism is the fundamental divide inside the GOP. While split on foreign policy between neo-conservatism and neo-isolationism, Republicans have near-unanimity on economic and social policy. A domestic Rubio presidency would look very much like a Cruz presidency or a Bush or a Walker presidency. Any Republican would sign the bills passed by Paul Ryan's House and Mitch McConnell's Senate.

What Republicans disagree about is how to handle a situation where the president does not sign those bills. ■■■■■ response to whip up conservative suspicions that the Republican failure to enact its agenda over President Obama's objections represents a secret betrayal. Trump's response is to break the stalemate through unique force of personality. Both of them signal their solidarity with the base through demonstrations of anger and cultural resentment. But, while making themselves attractive to their base, Trump and Cruz harden a cultural polarization that seems to leave their party at a disadvantage in the general election. He avoids statements that make him appear ostentatiously deranged, like Cruz visually comparing Obama to a Nazi, or Trump ... doing just about everything Trump has done. The third cause of Rubio's moderate image is that he declines to indulge right-wing paranoia on such topics as whether Obama is a Marxist, or the looming threat of Sharia law in the United States, trading the opportunity to indicate solidarity with the base for general election viability. He husbands his potential electoral weakness for matters of policy, not symbolism.

Jonathan Chait: Rubio's value to the party is that he approaches its predicament realistically. He will reach out to Democratic-leaning constituencies with personal appeal without compromising on core agenda items Republicans care about. Everything Rubio says — his message of generational change, a "*new American century*," his frequent invocations of his parents — ties into his youth and heritage as the son of immigrants. If Democrats attack his policies, he will change the subject to his biography. "If ■■■■■ our nominee, how is Hillary Clinton gonna lecture me about living paycheck to paycheck?" he boasted at a Republican debate. "*I was raised paycheck to paycheck.*" Rubio is the embodiment of the Republican donor class's conviction that it needs to alter nothing more than its face.

For All of You Who Believe The Myth That Reagan Was Tougher on Iran Than Obama

WRONG... WRONG... Wrong...



At this point, it should be taken for granted that anything President Obama does or doesn't do will be met with hysterical outrage and scorn from Republicans and conservative media. Their most recent tantrum is over the handling of the two Navy patrol boats that drifted into Iranian waters, were captured, and promptly released the next day.

Instead of celebrating their release, Conservative media showed the American sailors with their hands above their head, prior to being taken into custody. But then lets imagine the reverse, would it have been any different is two Iranian military vessels had traveled halfway around the world and got stranded in American coastal waters? Yet, the detaining of the American sailors were portrayed as a capture instead of a detention and somehow this was due to President being seen as weak.

Of course, this was taken as an excuse to disparage the President and his whole foreign policy, blaming his historic nuclear peace deal for “*emboldening*” Iran and letting them “*push us around.*” Comparisons to Ronald Reagan were made posthaste; the situation was instantly turned into an excuse to provoke a war with Iran. Overcompensating machismo and vague appeals to strength through violence are the consistent themes of what can only be generously referred to as a “*discourse,*” rather than “*jingoistic frenzy*” that passes for

It will also come as no surprise that all those who were salivating over the thought of Ronald Reagan turning Tehran into a parking lot are very ignorant of how Ronald Reagan reacted to a much more serious standoff with Iran. The Senior Political Contributor at Forbes, Rick Ungar, took to Facebook to drop a proverbial truth-bomb on the rabid right-wing and correct a few of the serious misconceptions that they have about Reagan:

Sheer wonderment as to all those who are posting the photo of our sailors on their knees as Iranian Revolutionary Guard arrests them. Virtually each and every one of these postings are accompanied by a notice that Obama is a weak jerk for allowing the Iranians to do this to American soldiers and then reminding us that if Ronald Reagan was president, Iran would be a parking lot.

Really?

One of the advantages of having graduated high school with Abraham Lincoln is that I was quite present during the Reagan administration. I remember all too well when our Marine barracks in Lebanon was bombed during Reagan's term of office, killing 241 Marines and injuring another 100. Reagan knew who did it- it was Hezbollah with the support of Iran and Syria. How did Ronald Reagan respond?

First, Reagan assembled his National Security team and hatched a plan to seek retribution by blowing up the Sheik Abdullah barracks in Baalbek, Lebanon, which housed Iranian Revolutionary Guards that were there to train Hezbollah fighters. The only problem was that Reagan ultimately decided not to do it because it would harm relations with other Arab nations.

Not only did he not do anything to avenge the deaths of our Marines, four months later he withdrew all of our Marines from Lebanon, never so much as firing a shot in retribution for our dead military. There was no shortage of people at that time who were incensed with that move, just like these armchair quarterbacks who are on Obama's case because someone took a photograph they don't like- forget killing over 200 of our finest.

Now, there were others who thought that Reagan did the right thing. You can think what you want but please stop with the "Reagan would have turned the place into a parking lot" when Obama's response pales by a factor of a million or so when compared to Reagan's decision. So, to those who like to pretend to be pundits but can't be bothered to have so much as a clue when it comes to knowing what they are talking about, may I respectfully suggest that you STFU until you study just a little bit of history.

That's right, Republicans – your beloved patron saint did nothing about the deaths of 200 Americans – not because he didn't want to, or because he was weak, but because there was much more at stake than his pride or a petty need for revenge. Bombing Damascus and Tehran wouldn't bring back the dead; it would only cause more strife and conflict in the long run and further damage his foreign policy agenda.

Now consider that without firing a shot, President Obama has disarmed Iran's nuclear program and immediately defused a potential crisis by using simple diplomacy – but he is still roundly lambasted for it? It should be obvious that the right-wing's campaign to trigger a war with Iran is nothing but a conspiracy by religious war-hawks, the Israelis, and defense contractors who all stand to profit from such a conflict; the losers would be our soldiers, our economy, millions of innocent civilians, and any possibility of peace or democracy in the Middle East for decades.

And if this isn't enough evidence, remember that the Reagan Administration arranged for military arms to be sold to Iran, against U.S. law... I think that it was called, "*The Iran/Contra Scandal*". But for Obama haters, these kind of facts are just an inconvenience.... ***which is my rant of the week....***

WEEK'S READINGS

Gun Deaths Are Now Outpacing Traffic Deaths In 21 States, And Counting

Some studies say it's only a matter of time before this trend extends nationally.



More people died from guns than from motor vehicle accidents in 21 states in 2014, according to a report released this week. The **Violence Policy Center**, a research group that advocates for gun safety legislation, has found in past reports that traffic fatalities have been declining due to what the organization calls "*effective regulation*," such as safety prevention initiatives, improved vehicle and highway design, and efforts from the government and advocacy groups. Firearm-related deaths, meanwhile, have only climbed.

The **VPC** analyzed the latest available data from the **Centers for Disease Control** and Prevention, which tallies all gun deaths, including suicides and accidents, and all fatalities in car crashes. As the number of people who die in car crashes goes down, the organization says, the number of people who die from guns is going up needlessly.

"Firearms are the only consumer product the federal government does not regulate for health and safety," VPC Legislative Director Kristen Rand said in a press release. "Meanwhile, science-based regulations have dramatically reduced deaths from motor vehicles in recent decades. It's well past time that we regulate firearms for health and safety just like all other consumer products." When VPC first compared firearm and traffic deaths in 2009, gun deaths exceeded fatal motor vehicle accidents in only 10 states. That number more than doubled in just six years.

A full list of the 21 states can be found below:

Gun Deaths Exceed Motor Vehicle Deaths in 21 States and the District of Columbia in 2014⁵

Jurisdiction	Gun Deaths	Motor Vehicle Deaths	Gun Death Rate per 100,000	Motor Vehicle Death Rate per 100,000
Alaska	145	87	19.68	11.81
Arizona	927	857	13.77	12.73
Colorado	663	545	12.38	10.18
District of Columbia	86	37	13.05	5.62
Georgia	1,391	1,289	13.78	12.77
Idaho	213	212	13.03	12.97
Illinois	1,179	1,075	9.15	8.35
Indiana	818	774	12.40	11.73
Louisiana	896	807	19.27	17.36
Maryland	546	480	9.14	8.03
Michigan	1,095	1,014	11.05	10.23
Missouri	943	801	15.55	13.21
Nevada	429	319	15.11	11.24
New Hampshire	122	107	9.19	8.06
Ohio	1,211	1,137	10.44	9.81
Oregon	497	380	12.52	9.57
Pennsylvania	1,390	1,287	10.87	10.06
Tennessee	1,020	1,000	15.57	15.27
Utah	337	261	11.45	8.87
Vermont	69	49	11.01	7.82
Virginia	889	789	10.68	9.48
Washington	702	583	9.94	8.26

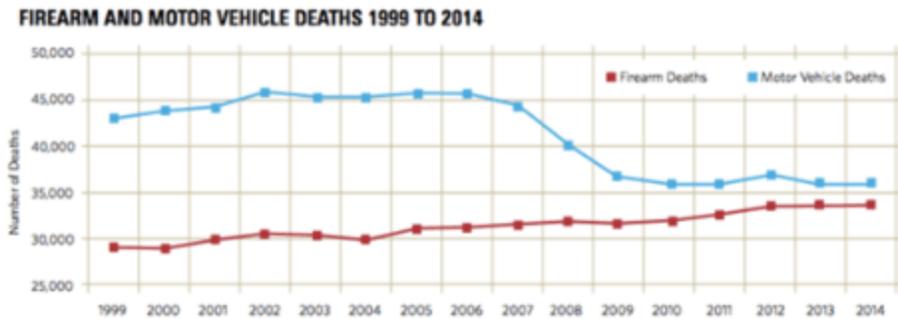
Web Link: <http://www.vpc.org/studies/gunsvs cars16.pdf>

"The historic drop in motor vehicle deaths illustrates how health and safety regulation can reduce deaths and injuries that were at one time thought to be unavoidable," the report stated. Nine out of 10 American households in 2014 had access to cars, while only one-third had access to guns, according to the group.

Automobile deaths far outpaced gun deaths for years, but that gap has been closing steadily over the past decade. In 2014, the **Center for American Progress** predicted that more young Americans would die from guns than motor vehicles in 2015. Other reports have made similar predictions across all age groups, suggesting that 2015 could be the first year gun deaths would top automobile deaths nationwide.

Last year's data isn't available yet, but the **VPC** shows that vehicle deaths still exceeded gun fatalities nationwide in 2014 -- 35,647 to 33,599. However, the organization says gun deaths will surpass motor

vehicle deaths in more and more states if current trends continue.



VIOLENCE POLICY CENTER

Gun violence kills an average of 36 people a day in the U.S. -- a number that doesn't include suicides which account for more than 60 percent of all firearm deaths -- and many experts say the time to rethink our approach to the problem is overdue. **Doctors For America**, an organization for medical professionals and students promoting health, now calls gun violence a public health crisis, and Surgeon General Vivek Murthy has referred to gun violence as a health epidemic.

Congress has not budged on restrictions it passed two decades ago that have kept the **CDC** from researching gun violence as a public health issue. Earlier this month, a number of senators called for a hearing on the years-long blockage and pushed for the agency to research the issue. Sen. Edward Markey (D-Mass.) and Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-███) also presented legislation that would invest \$10 million a year over the next decade into the CDC's gun violence research. *"The epidemic of gun violence in America is not preordained, it is preventable,"* Markey said in a press release announcing the legislation.

Mariah Stewart – Huffington Post – January 15, 2016

And the Conservative Republican solution is to make guns more available.... Stupid with a "T"!

The Map That Will Change How You See The World



How do you view your country relative to others? Chances are if it's based on most world maps, your view is distorted. Trying to represent a sphere on a flat surface is inherently problematic. Those countries along the equator seem smaller, while nations such as Canada and Russia are commonly stretched and appear larger than reality. But what if countries were scaled based on their population?

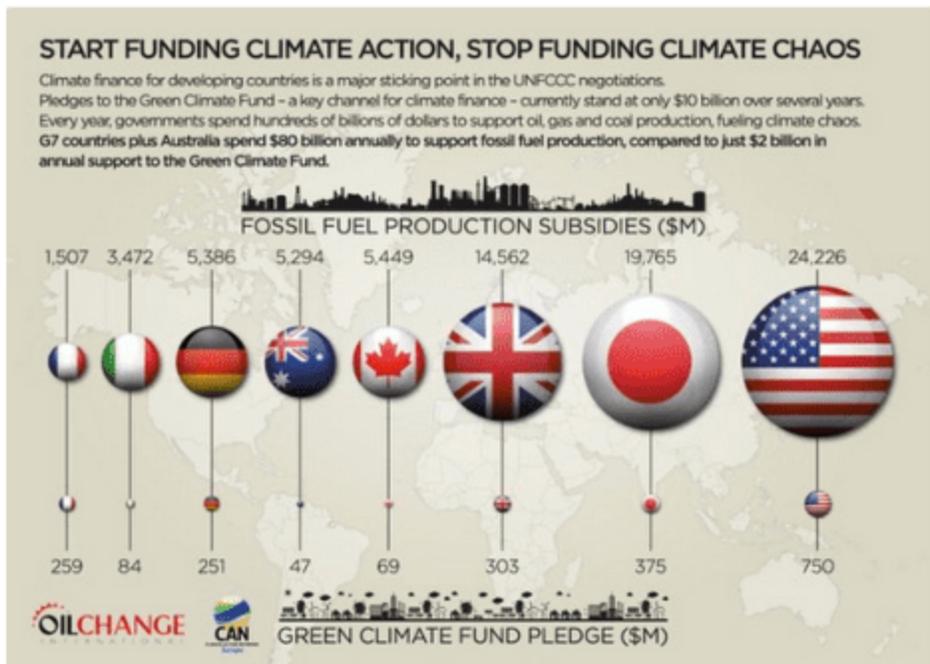
The following cartogram, created by Reddit user TeaDranks, has done just that, and it could change your entire perception of the world. Cartograms scale a region's geographic space according to a particular attribute and in this case each square now represents 500,000 people. Open the website below and click on the cursor over the countries to get a real understanding how the map works.

Web Link: <https://agenda.weforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/1601B11-cartogram-countries-scaled-to-population-world-map.png>

We all know that India and China have large populations, but this map emphasizes their size on a global scale. Compared to conventional world maps, the two Asian powerhouses dominate. Along with several East Asian neighbors – Bangladesh, Japan, the Philippines and Indonesia – their contribution to the global population is clear. The size of Nigeria and Brazil compared to the rest of Africa and Latin America is equally apparent.

The map also effectively highlights the contribution of cities and regions to total populations. For example, the greater Tokyo region accounts for a significant proportion of Japan's overall population. Equally, Delhi, Shanghai and Mumbai all occupy areas larger than many European nations.

At the other end of the scale, some economies which are barely visible on traditional world maps appear much larger on the cartogram. Consider the cases of Hong Kong and Taiwan, whose relatively large populations compared to their geographical sizes see them feature much more prominently. Conversely, some countries which are very large on conventional maps can barely be seen. Canada, Russia and Australia are much smaller in TeaDranks' representation, which was inspired by Paul Breeding's 2005 work. Canada in particular disappears almost entirely.



If there is money to subsidize oil, gas and coal production, then there is money to fund wind, solar and other renewable fuel production.

As If Slavery Weren't Enough, 6 Other Reasons to Avoid Shrimp



Delicious treat, or the devil's crustacean?

Ah, shrimp. Americans can't get enough of it: Per capita consumption has doubled since the early '80s, and we now eat on average about four pounds per year of the briny crustacean. Not even tuna and salmon (about 2.3 pounds each) outshine the shrimp on the US dinner table.

But the all-you-can-eat specials and fish counter fire sales ride on a massive shrimp-farming boom in the developing world, mainly in South Asia. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, global farmed shrimp production leapt from 154,000 metric tons in 2000 to 3.3 million metric tons in 2013. Imports now account for 90 percent of the shrimp we eat.

Yet for all its abundance, the diminutive shellfish carries some heavy baggage you might want to consider before consuming your next shrimp cocktail. Since its inception, the farmed-shrimp industry has been plagued by reports of unsavory working conditions and ecological destruction. Last month's Associated Press blockbuster on slavery in Thai shrimp-processing factories is only the latest chapter. Here are six more problems with America's favorite seafood:

- Awful conditions on Thailand's shrimp farms are nothing new. Staffed largely by migrant workers from Cambodia, Laos, and Burma, Thailand's shrimp farms, the source of 11.7 percent of US imported shrimp, have a labor rap sheet as long as the line at an all-you-can-eat buffet. In 2012, the Washington Post found that "overseas demand for shrimp products in greater volume has fueled a culture of exploitation in the Thai industry," *including teenagers working "16-hour shifts, seven days a week, for less than \$3 a day."* A 2013 investigation by international labor groups found a variety of abuses on facilities owned by a major supplier to the US market, including illegal use of underage workers and illegal wages cuts. And a 2008 report from the UK labor rights group The Solidarity Centre found child labor, debt bondage, and wage theft on both Thai and Bangladeshi shrimp farms.

- Farmed shrimp has a massive carbon footprint. Mangrove forests are engines of biodiversity along tropical shorelines—the very site of the shrimp boom. A 2012 UN report found that one-fifth of the globe's mangroves have been destroyed since 1980, and "many remaining mangrove forests are considered degraded." As much as 38 percent of that loss can be attributed to the spread of shrimp farming, the report found. And since healthy mangrove forests sponge up huge amounts of carbon, killing them contributes significantly to climate change. The Oregon State University ecologist and mangrove expert J. Boone Kauffman estimates farmed shrimp has 10 times the carbon footprint of beef raised in cleared rainforest land.

- Farmed shrimp often has traces of antibiotics and antibiotic-resistant bacteria — and the FDA barely tests it as it comes in. Shrimp farms rely on antibiotics to speed up growth and control disease. For a 2015 investigation, Consumer Reports bought shrimp from retailers across the country and tested them for chemical and bacterial residues. Of 205 imported raw, farmed shrimp samples, 11 tested positive for one or more antibiotics, and 6 turned up with an antibiotic-resistant staph bug called MRSA. For a 2012 study, FDA scientists found that roughly 10 percent of samples tested showed resistance to no fewer than eight different antibiotics. The researchers concluded that "imported shrimp is a reservoir for multi-drug-resistant *Klebsiella*," which can trigger urinary tract infections and pneumonia. Yet the FDA's inspection of incoming farmed shrimp is so weak and "ineffectively implemented" that the General Accounting Office gave it this harsh assessment in 2011.

- Eating it doesn't help with over fishing. Shrimp farms not only harm wild fish stocks by destroying mangroves, which are essentially the oceans' nurseries in tropical areas; they also contribute to over fishing. That's because most shrimp species are carnivorous, and it takes about 1.3 pounds of wild fish—in the form of processed fishmeal—to produce a pound of edible farmed shrimp.

• Cheap farmed shrimp is helping kill the wild US shrimp fishery. "A surge of imported shrimp from Indonesia, Ecuador, and India has sent [US] prices plunging by more than a third in the past year," Bloomberg Business reported in September. That's good news for shrimp fans, but rotten news for shrimpers in US coastal waters. "If something doesn't change and prices don't rise, fishermen cannot continue to work for these prices," the president of the Louisiana Shrimp Association told Bloomberg. Battered not only by cheap foreign competition but also by recent cataclysmic hurricanes and oil spills, the Gulf shrimp industry—the source of the most US-caught wild shrimp — is in crisis. The annual harvest is down 35 percent from five years ago, and the "number of permits for shrimping boats is down 24 percent since 2007," Bloomberg reports.

• Then there's wild shrimp's bycatch problem — and also mislabeling. In 2014, Oceana named the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery one of the nine "*dirtiest*" in the United States in terms of by catch. Commercial shrimp boats use "nets as wide as a football fields" and inadvertently "catch millions of pounds of sharks and other reef fish such as snappers and groupers" and "injure tens of thousands of sea turtles." And while eating wild shrimp means fewer antibiotic residues and a lower carbon footprint than farmed fish, the stuff marketed as "*wild*" is often falsely labeled farmed product, according to another 2014 Oceana study.

Tom Philpott — Mother Jones — Jan. 6, 2016

THIS WEEK'S QUOTE

"Never get mad at someone for being who they've always been. Be upset with yourself for not coming to terms with it sooner."

THINK ABOUT THIS



If justice is blind or fair please explain how this happened.

An Explanation about What is Happening

Unsure why oil is in the news? This video from Bloomberg News explains it.



Web Link: [\[REDACTED\]](#)

BEST VIDEO OF THE WEEK

If Elephants Dream



Web Link: <https://youtu.be/UeTmE71uEaw>

From **ArgoFilm's "Wisdom of the Wild"** comes the moving story of **Daphne Sheldrick** and her elephant orphanage. This documentary was produced for **PBS' Nature Series**.

Daphne Sheldrick is one of those heroes you won't hear about in the news, she won't have schools named after her, but a hero who in the span of almost half a century saved hundreds of orphaned elephants right there in her home in Nairobi.

Mrs. Sheldrick is the one who perfected the formula that mimics elephant milk which proved to be crucial for these babies orphaned by poachers. Even though in her 80, she still gets up every morning with the same dedication to keep these gentle giants safe from extinction just a bit longer. Truly an inspirational human being.

THIS WEEK'S MUSIC

Rachelle Ferrell



This week you are invited to enjoy the music of Ms. Rachelle Ferrell – composer, lyricist, arranger, musician and jazz vocalist whose international visibility has grown to include the pop/urban contemporary scene, which in turn has boosted her audience's interest in her jazz recordings.

Born and raised in the Philadelphia area, Ferrell got started singing in the second grade at age six. This no doubt contributed to the eventual development of her startling six-and-change octave range. She decided early on, after classical training on violin, that she wanted to try to make her mark musically as an instrumentalist and songwriter. In her mid-teens, her father bought her a piano with the provision that she learn to play to a professional level. Within six months, Ferrell had secured her first professional gig as a pianist/singer. She began performing at 13 as a violinist, and in her mid-teens as a pianist and vocalist.

At 18, she enrolled in the Berklee College of Music in Boston to study composition and arranging, where her classmates included Branford Marsalis, Kevin Eubanks, Donald Harrison, and Jeff Watts. She graduated in a year and taught music for a while with Dizzy Gillespie for the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. Through the '80s and into the early '90s, she'd worked with some of the top names in jazz, including Gillespie, Quincy Jones, George Benson, and George Duke.

From 1975 until 1990, Ferrell sang backup for Lou Rawls, Patti LaBelle, Vanessa Williams, and George Duke. Ferrell's debut album, *First Instrument*, was released in 1990. Recorded with bassist Tyrone Brown, pianist Eddie Green, and drummer Doug Nally, an all-star cast of accompanists also left their mark on her record. They include trumpeter Terrence Blanchard, pianists Gil Goldstein and Michel Petrucciani, bassists Kenny Davis and Stanley Clarke, tenor saxophonist Wayne Shorter, and keyboardist Pete Levin. Her unique take on now-standards like Sam Cooke's "You Send Me," Cole

Porter's "*What Is This Thing Called Love*," and Rodgers & Hart's "*My Funny Valentine*," captured the hearts and souls of the Japanese jazz-buying public.

In 1995, Blue Note/Capitol released her Japanese debut for U.S. audiences, and the response was similarly positive. Her 1992 self-titled U.S. debut, a more urban pop/contemporary album, was released on Capitol Records. Ferrell was signed to a unique two-label contract, recording pop and urban contemporary for Capitol Records and jazz music for Blue Note Records. For four consecutive years in the early '90s, Ferrell put in festival-stopping performances at the Montreux Jazz Festival.

Although Ferrell has captured the jazz public's attention as a vocalist, she continues to compose and write songs on piano and violin. Ferrell's work ethic has paid off, and Gillespie's predictions about her becoming a "*major force*" in the jazz industry came true. Her prolific songwriting abilities and ability to accompany herself on piano seem only to further her natural talent as a vocalist.

"Some people sing songs like they wear clothing, they put it on and take it off," she explains in the biographical notes accompanying First Instrument. "But when one performs four sets a night, six nights a week, that experience affords you the opportunity to present the song from the inside out, to express its essence. In this way, a singer expresses the song in the spirit in which it was written. The songwriter translates emotion into words. The singer's job is to translate the words back into emotion."

Ferrell has made her mark not as a straight-ahead jazz singer and pianist, but as a crossover artist who is equally at home with urban contemporary pop, gospel, classical music, and jazz. With this said, you are again invited to enjoy the musical mastery of Ms. Rachele Ferrell...

Rachele Ferrell – ***My Funny Valentine*** -- <https://youtu.be/7M3DDLZHpw>

Rachele Ferrell – ***I Can Explain*** -- https://youtu.be/w2uD_MUu55U

Rachele Ferrell – ***Welcome To My Love*** -- <https://youtu.be/7fx7zR4-ANU>

Rachele Ferrell – ***If Only I Knew*** -- <https://youtu.be/RRpWvIKCFO0>

Rachele Ferrell – ***'Til You Come Back To Me*** -- <https://youtu.be/h65azRDIg4Q>

Rachele Ferrell – ***With Open Arms*** -- <https://youtu.be/Zvgl-M-YHsk>

Rachele Ferrell – ***Song 6*** -- <https://youtu.be/5BcaSxLgTOo>

Rachele Ferrell – ***Waiting*** -- <https://youtu.be/vqETCwMPKqw>

Rachele Ferrell – ***Sista*** -- <https://youtu.be/qdtwon67Uqg>

Rachele Ferrell – ***Thank You Lord*** -- <https://youtu.be/soXn-ORokdA>

Rachele Ferrell – ***Run To You*** -- <https://youtu.be/Y1x6xfZ5tCw>

Rachele Ferrell & George Duke – ***With Every Breath I Take*** -- <https://youtu.be/-TygQkOWeLw>

Rachelle Ferrell & George Benson – ***Everything Must Change*** -- <https://youtu.be/eKIYk8tdgE>

Rachelle Ferrell & Jennifer Hudson – <https://youtu.be/W0z28DVKBDI>

Rachelle Ferrell & Will Downing – ***Nothing Has Ever Felt Like This*** --
<https://youtu.be/pf83djaTS4>

BONUS TRACK

Rachelle Ferrell & Deborah Cox pay tribute to the Legendary Natalie Cole --
<https://youtu.be/8YiNIBt25W8>

I hope that you enjoyed this week's offerings and wish you and everyone you love a great week....

Sincerely,

Greg Brown

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