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DEAR FRIEND.....

The Middle-Class Squeeze.... *it's getting worse....*



Adhabet Kidane, 30, a single mother in Tampa, Florida, earns minimum wage at two fast-food restaurants.

We don't need the to read the **New York Times** op-ed by Dionne Searchey and Robert Gebeloff – ***Middle Class Shrinks Further as More Fall Out Instead of Climbing Up*** – to realize that

millions of American families are falling further and further behind. We also don't need to see the graphs and charts favored by economists to know that wages have not really grown for more than a decade. And we definitely don't need a fortune teller to realize that in most families, their children will not live as well as they as their parents. No wonder why in the State of the Union Speech, President Obama focused on reviving the middle class, offering a raft of proposals squarely aimed at concerns like paying for a college education, taking parental leave, affording child care and buying a home. *"Middle-class economics means helping working families feel more secure in a world of constant change,"* Mr. Obama told Congress and the public.

Regardless of their income, most Americans identify as middle class. The term itself is so amorphous that politicians often cite the group in introducing proposals to engender wide appeal. The definition here starts at \$35,000 — which is about 50 percent higher than the official poverty level for a family of four — and ends at the six figure mark. Although many Americans in households making more than \$100,000 consider themselves middle class, particularly those living in expensive regions like the Northeast and Pacific Coast, they have substantially more money than most people.

However the lines are drawn, it is clear that millions are struggling to hang on to accouterments that most experts consider essential to a middleclass life. *"I would consider middle class to be people who can live comfortably on what they earn, can pay their bills, can set aside something to save for retirement and for kids in college and can have vacations and entertainment,"* said Christine L. Owens, executive director of the National Employment Law Project, a leftleaning research and advocacy group. Lisa Land, 49, is one of those who have dropped through the hatch. She gets by on her father's \$1,300 monthly Social Security checks and by having her adult daughter pitch in for groceries.

In the late 1960s, more than half of the households in the United States were squarely in the middle, earning, in today's dollars, \$35,000 to \$100,000 a year. Few people noticed or cared as the size of that group began to fall, because the shift was primarily caused by more Americans climbing the economic ladder into upperincome brackets. But since 2000, the middle class share of households has continued to narrow, the main reason being that more people have fallen to the bottom. At the same time, fewer of those in this group fit the traditional image of a married couple with children at home, a gap increasingly filled by the elderly.

Even as the American middle class has shrunk, it has gone through a transformation. The 53 million households that remain in the middle class — about 43 percent of all households — look considerably different from their middle class predecessors of a previous generation, according to a New York Times analysis of census data. In recent years, the fastest growing component of the new middle class has been households headed by people 65 and older. Today's seniors have better retirement benefits than previous generations. Also, older Americans are increasingly working past traditional retirement age. More than eight million, or 19 percent, were in the labor force in 2013, nearly twice as many as in 2000.

As a result, while median household income, on average, has fallen 9 percent since the turn of the century, it has jumped 14 percent among households headed by older adults. The growing prominence of older people in the middle class reflects, in part, the way Social Security and Medicare — originally set up as safety nets to protect seniors from falling into poverty after retirement — have provided a substantial cushion for them against hard times.

Married couples with children — who make up a category that is shrinking over all — are diminishing even faster as a share of the middle class. In the late 1960s, about 45 percent of all households included married adults and their offspring. But among middleclass households, more than 60 percent had that traditional family arrangement. Today, married couples with children at home make up just a quarter of households. But even as they diminished as a share of the population, these families surged up the economic ladder as more married women went to work in the paid labor force. By 2000, 42 percent earned more than \$100,000 in today's dollars.

The most recent recession put a halt to the advances of even that generally successful group. Its share in the middle class has fallen by three percentage points and the share earning less than \$35,000 has increased. *"In the Great Recession, we lost a lot of middleincome jobs and we gained a lot of low-paying jobs,"* said Michael R. Strain, resident scholar at the rightofcenter American Enterprise Institute. *"That's a slowerburning thing, but it increased in ferocity during the recession, and people are feeling it."*

These days, most middleclass adults reached their status through higher education. As recently as 1992, half of all middleclass households were headed by someone with a high school education or less, according to the Times analysis. Today, only 37 percent of the middle class has not been to college. Geography also matters. The biggest declines in middleclass households during the previous half-century occurred in the Northeast — states like Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Jersey — where industrial economies gave way to mass suburbanization and increased affluence.

According to a New York Times poll in December, 60 percent of people who call themselves middle class think that if they work hard they will get rich. But the evidence suggests that goal is increasingly out of reach. When middle class people look up, they see the rich getting richer while they spin their wheels. *"The middle has basically stayed the same; it hasn't improved,"* said Lawrence F. Katz, an economist at Harvard University. *"You've got an iPhone now and a better TV, but your median income hasn't changed. What's really changed is the penthouse has become super nice."* Still, there are some recent signs of hope for the middle class. The economy is improving and more jobs are being created, many of them in betterpaying categories like professional services, health care and even a reviving manufacturing sector.

Jason Pappas's prospects, for example, are looking up. Mr. Pappas, 32, from Muncie, Ind., was earning about \$42 an hour as an iron worker in the mid2000s, but building projects dried up during the recession, pushing him onto the unemployment rolls for a year and a half. He eventually found a job as a truck driver. Today, he earns just over half the hourly wage he made as an iron worker, but he is happy to have a steady job. *"It pays the bills,"* he said, *"and I have medical insurance."* Moreover, Mr. Pappas just learned that he was being promoted to supervisor. Soon, with overtime, he'll be earning \$80,000 a year. He is feeling a lot better about his future. *"Hard work pays off,"* Mr. Pappas said. Except that no matter how hard you are willing to work, if you can't find a job that provides advancement opportunities you like millions of other Americans will see your quality of life being squeezed more..... And sorry Ms. Kidane you are not in the Middle-Class..... *You are Working Poor....*

Let's Not Overreact to the taunts of ISIS, Boko Haram, etc.

Because this is what they want....



When modern Middle Eastern terrorism first appeared on the scene in the 1960s and 70s, the historian David Fromkin wrote an essay in **Foreign Affairs** (magazine) that is probably the best guide to understanding this phenomena. Fromkin provided two examples of terror tactics that worked and have important lessons. He recounted a meeting in 1945 with the leader of the **Irgun**. (A group of about 1,500 Jewish militants in Palestine which was then part of the British Empire.) The Irgun knew that they could not defeat the mighty British army so they decided to blow up buildings and create the appearance of chaos. This the Irgun leader told Fromkin, would lead the British to over react by garrisoning the country. Drawing forces from across the Empire and that would strain British coffers and eventually London would have to leave Palestine. Fromkin noted that the Irgun seeing that it was too small to defeat Great Britain decided as an alternative approach that Britain was big enough to defeat itself.

ISIS' strategy is certainly one version of this. The targeting of America and its allies. The videos, the barbarism are all designed to draw Washington into a ground battle in Syria. And the hope that this complicated bloody and protracted war would sap the super power's strength.

Fromkim offers another example the **National Liberation Front**. (The group of nationalist trying to break Algeria free from France in the nineteen fifties and sixties. The Paris government argued that Algeria was not a colony what part of France with all of its citizens treated as French men and women.) So the FLN began a campaign of terror in order to provoke an overreaction from the French government, getting them to regard all Muslims Algerians as suspects. Quote *"The French thought that when the FLN planet a bomb in a public bus it was in order to blow up the bus... But the FLN's true aim was two more authority he's into reacting by arresting all non Europeans in the area as suspects."* **David Fromkn**

The many recent acts of terror committed in Europe can be said to have a strategy but they could make European governments and people to treat or Muslims in Europe as suspicious and dangerous. And then the terrorists will have achieved an important goal. Now these things do not have to happen.

Fromkin concluded his essay by noting *"though terrorism cannot always be prevented it can always be defeated, you can always refuse to do what they want you to do."* **David Fromkin**

Critics pounce after Obama talks Crusades, slavery at prayer breakfast



National Prayer Breakfast: The annual event brings together U.S. and international leaders from different parties and religions for an hour devoted to faith.

On Feb. 5, 2015 President Obama gave a speech during the **National Prayer Breakfast** in Washington, and some of his comments have conservatives, especially Christians, extremely angry. The president welcomed the Dalai Lama, thanked the attendees and other speakers, and made a few jokes. These are not the comments that have outraged right-wing Christians. After musing about his own Christian faith, President Obama pointed out the challenges we have faced over the past few months, and the past six years, when it comes to religious extremism. At a time of global anxiety over Islamist terrorism, Obama noted pointedly that his fellow Christians, who make up a vast majority of Americans, should perhaps not be the ones who cast the first stone because over the centuries faith has been used *"as an instrument great good, but also twisted and misused in the name of evil."*

From his speech:

As we speak, around the world, we see faith inspiring people to lift up one another — to feed the hungry and care for the poor, and comfort the afflicted and make peace where there is strife. We heard the good work that Sister has done in Philadelphia, and the incredible work that Dr. Brantly and his colleagues have done. We see faith driving us to do right.

But we also see faith being twisted and distorted, used as a wedge — or, worse, sometimes used as a weapon. From a school in Pakistan to the streets of Paris, we have seen violence and terror perpetrated by those who profess to stand up for faith, their faith, professed to stand up for Islam, but, in fact, are betraying it. We see ISIL, a brutal, vicious death cult that, in the name of religion, carries out unspeakable acts of barbarism — terrorizing religious minorities like the Yezidis, subjecting women to rape as a weapon of war, and claiming the mantle of religious authority for such actions.

So far, so good. Detailing examples of faith inspiring good, people who follow the message of Actual Jesus, then speaking about the horrors of ISIL, and the terrorist acts in Pakistan and Paris. Calling ISIL a “*brutal, vicious death cult,*” which they are. Using the words terror and terrorizing. President Obama continued:

We see sectarian war in Syria, the murder of Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, religious war in the Central African Republic, a rising tide of anti-Semitism and hate crimes in Europe, so often perpetrated in the name of religion.

So how do we, as people of faith, reconcile these realities — the profound good, the strength, the tenacity, the compassion and love that can flow from all of our faiths, operating alongside those who seek to hijack religious for their own murderous ends?

Perfectly stated. Show the atrocities, then ask how people of faith reconcile the profound good with the acts of “*those who seek to hijack religion for their own murderous ends.*” Then it all came off the rails, at least for conservative Christians. President Obama could have stopped here, secure to rest on his laurels, but he took it a step further. Again, from the speech:

Humanity has been grappling with these questions throughout human history. And lest we get on our high horse and think this is unique to some other place, remember that during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ. In our home country, slavery and Jim Crow all too often was justified in the name of Christ. Michelle and I returned from India — an incredible, beautiful country, full of magnificent diversity — but a place where, in past years, religious faiths of all types have, on occasion, been targeted by other peoples of faith, simply due to their heritage and their beliefs — acts of intolerance that would have shocked Gandhiji, the person who helped to liberate that nation.

So this is not unique to one group or one religion. There is a tendency in us, a sinful tendency that can pervert and distort our faith. In today’s world, when hate groups have their own Twitter accounts and bigotry can fester in hidden places in cyberspace, it can be even harder to counteract such intolerance. But God compels us to try. And in this mission, I believe there are a few principles that can guide us, particularly those of us who profess to believe.

Moments after the President pointed out that the Crusades, Spanish Inquisitions, slavery and other atrocities were committed with the support of Religions, including Christianity at the annual National Prayer Breakfast on February 5, 2015, Republicans pounced on what he said. And, first, we should

start with some basic humility. I believe that the starting point of faith should be — not being so full of yourself and so confident that you are right and that God speaks only to us, and doesn't speak to others, that God only cares about us and doesn't care about others, that somehow we alone are in possession of the truth.

Conservative media went ballistic over the President's remarks. Exhibit A: a few comments from Fox Nation's Facebook page, underneath the link to their article on the president's speech:

Dale Brumley: "They want to take prayer out of school why not take Islam out of the USA"

Morrow Leigh: "islam belongs in the dark ages"

Ann Blanchard: "I can't figure out what took people so long to catch on to who and what Obama really is, I didn't vote for him because I had my suspicions from the beginning, I have always suspected him of being a Muslim, I also believe he was never elected, he was selected, bought and paid for by some very affluent person, after I read some books on him and about him, I was sure he was never on our side, he is out to ruin our once beautiful country and we are letting him get away with it, I fear for my grandchildren and great grandchildren what kind of a life will they have, if any of them survive this war between Muslim's and Christians, Let's hope someone will save us and our country before it's too late.....God Bless the USA....."

Thank God some cooler heads chimed in as Conservative columnist David Brooks remarked **on PBS Newhour** show, *"I thought that if the President had come (to the Prayer Breakfast) as an atheist to attack religion or to attack Christianity the Republicans would have a point, that's not what a President should be doing. But that is not how he came. He has used the Prayer Breakfast year after year to talk about his own faith, his own faith journey and his own struggles. He came as a Christian. And the things that he said I have never met a Christian who disagreed with what he said, that the religion has been perverted, that we have to walk humbly before the face of the Lord, that God's purposes are mysterious to us. This is not some tangential weird belief. This is the core of every Christian's faith or every Jew's faith. And so what he said is utterly normally admirable and a recognition of historical fact and an urge towards some humility. So I thought that the protests were manufactured and falsely manufactured."*

Religious extremism isn't just over there somewhere, it's also here. In the form of right-wing Christians, hijacking a message of peace and tolerance, and using it for evil. President Obama didn't have to go all the way back to the Crusades for his examples; he could have referenced any number of more recent events. The murder of George Tiller, the Sikh temple massacre, Timothy McVeigh, Byron Williams, and James W. Von Brunn—all modern examples of Christian extremism, not to mention three unprovoked wars and a number of proxy wars in the Middle East.

As a number of prominent Islamic scholars have pointed out. The current in terrorism in the Middle East is not a Muslim war. This is a war where the terrorists happen to be Muslims who are killing thousands of Muslims for every Westerner who gets caught in the crossfire or executed for propaganda purposes. So why would you credit a bunch of crazies for leading 1.5 billion people? By painting all Muslims with the same brush you give the leadership of ISIS and Boko Haram and other terrorist

group's power that they don't have and will never get. And when you follow their lead you become what they are intolerant jingoistic knuckleheads.

Bravo Common and John Legend



Web Link: <http://youtu.be/8F3g6lkKleY>

In what host Neil Patrick Harris called "*Whitest Oscars Ever*," the **87th Academy Awards** was the least racially diverse awards in 17 years principally because of the lack of recognition for the historical drama *Selma* and for not recognizing a single person of color in its acting categories. *Selma* got its moment in the sun with Common and John Legend's performance of "*Glory*." The Oscars telecast may have earned itself an Emmy nomination by building the Edmund Pettus Bridge on stage, set against a cloudy sky that gave way to stills from *Selma*. As Common rapped about Rosa Parks and Ferguson, Jim Crow and Martin Luther King, protesters marched peacefully as a unit—and without opposition—across the bridge onto the stage. The performance earned a standing ovation and left much of the audience, including David Oyelowo, who played Dr. King, in tears.

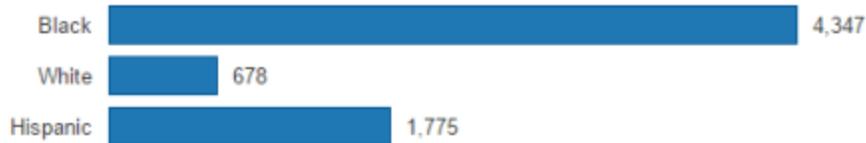
Following a rousing performance of "*Glory*," John Legend and Common took to the stage a second time to receive the **Oscar for Best Original Song** — and brought down the house again. "This bridge was once a landmark of a divided nation, but now it's a symbol for change," said Common, pointing to a stage replica of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, featured prominently in history and the film. "*The spirit of this bridge transcends race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and social status. ... This bridge was built on hope.*" While Common's speech was typically poetic, John Legend took aim at law and policy. "*Nina Simone said it's an artist's duty to reflect the times in which we live,*" Legend said. "*Selma is now because the struggle for justice is right now. We know that the Voting Rights Act that they fought for 50 years ago is being compromised right now in this country today.*" Legend also slammed the United States' high incarceration rates. "*We live in the most incarcerated country in the world,*" he said. "*There are more black men under correctional control today than were under slavery in 1850.*"

That was a dig at state lawmakers across the country, including in Texas and Wisconsin, which rushed to pass restrictive voting measures after the Supreme Court bored a hole in the **Voting Rights Act of**

1965. That postscript was nowhere to be found in Selma, but it matters because these new voting burdens fall hardest on minorities and the poor, and new court challenges aimed at reviving the landmark civil-rights statute have fallen short. Meanwhile, more voting restrictions are on the horizon.

Inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents by race

In 2010



But Legend took it up a notch when he referenced Michelle Alexander’s seminal ***The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness***, a book that dismantles the notion of America’s legal system as having anything to do with justice and instead shows how it’s a modern version of oppression for men of color. “*We know that the struggle for freedom and justice is real,*” Legend said. “*We live in the most incarcerated country in the world. There are more black men under correctional control today than were under slavery in 1850.*”

Notice the flair of saying “*under correctional control,*” which not only covers incarceration, but also some form of supervision from the state, including probation or parole. This is a real and pressing issue—perhaps the only one where polarization is fading. In November, the ACLU received a \$50 million grant, the largest in its history, to combat mass incarceration over an eight-year period. And last week, strange bedfellows Koch Industries and the Center for American Progress formed an alliance, the Coalition for Public Safety, to push policymakers at all levels of government to undo some of the damage from these policies, which have wrought untold damage on black communities.

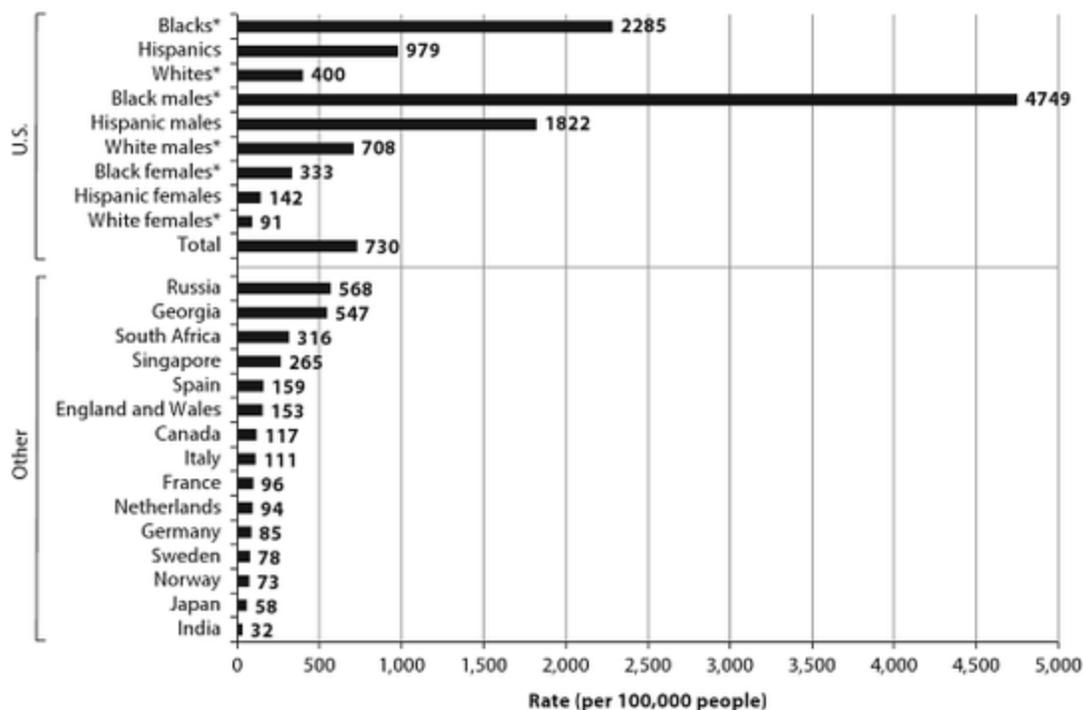


Figure 1.1. Incarceration Rates, Select Countries and Groups

* Excludes people of Hispanic or Latino origin

Sources: See p. 338, n. 16; Roy Walmsley, "World Prison Population List," 9th ed. (London: King's College, International Centre for Prison Studies, May 2011), http://www.kcl.ac.uk/depst/law/research/icps/downloads/wppl-8th_41.pdf (retrieved February 11, 2014).

But let's get back to the numbers. There are 2.3 million people in U.S. prisons and jails and another 5.6 million under correctional supervision, mostly young black and brown men and women. In 1850, the United States had more than 3.2 million slaves, according to the Census Bureau (see page six of this 1850 document). That number was broken down by gender in census data obtained by Politifact; it showed that 872,924 slaves were male. Justice Department data shows that 526,000 black men were under the jurisdiction of state or federal correctional authorities in 2013, and about 1,114,521 non-Hispanic black men were on probation or parole in 2013. (The DOJ doesn't list exact figures for race and gender, but notes that of the 3.9 million people on probation or parole, 38 percent were non-Hispanic blacks and 75 percent were male.) Wow.... John Legend was right and maybe this is because there are 320 million people but with this said the United States has more people incarcerated than any other country on the planet..... And this is an ugly stain on our democracy.



As Fareed Zakaria pointed out several weeks ago on his CNN show, the one of most important items in President Obama's latest budget is the monies for preschool education for every four year old in America from poor and moderate income families. Why? Because preschool is the crucial time to have an impact on a child's development. A **National Research Council Report** notes, *"From the time of conception to the first day of kindergarten a person's development precedes at a pace exceeding that of any subsequent stage of life."* Before age six the brain roughly quadruples in weight according to a study by the University of Manchester, and reaches about 90% of its adult size. 700 new neural connections are formed every second in the first years of life. And the brain is most flexible early in life and its capacity for change decreases with age.

Unfortunately the U.S. is way behind when it comes to educating our youngest brains. Only 38% of our 3 year olds are enrolled in some kind of preschools according to the OACD. That ranks the United States 32 out of the 39 most affluent countries in the world, trailing nations like Chile and Colombia. Belgium and France enroll nearly all of the three year olds, 98%. American Flyer roles don't fare much better, 66% enrollment compared to the OACD average of 86%. That rate also ranks 32nd out of 39. Meanwhile China is educating children for three whole years before primary school and growing their preschools at a blistering pace. In 2010 China had 57% enrolled and in 2013 that number had jumped to 68% and they expect to hit 75% in 2016.

Of course not every early education programs are equal but done right preschool can have a profound effect on people's lives. Recently The Washington Post cited **The Perry Preschool Project**. In 1962 researchers identified a group of 123 at-risk African American children in Michigan, giving about half of them access to preschool while the other half did not have access. They followed their subjects for four decades (40 years) and what they found was remarkable. 77% of the people who went to preschool graduated from high school compared to only 60% who had not gone to preschool. Those who went to preschool had a medium annual income of \$20,000 compared to the \$15,000 income for the non-preschoolers. And while 36% of the preschool graduates had been arrested more than five times, 56% of the non-preschool graduates had been arrested more than five times.

All told, the roughly \$15,000 investment per child yielded public savings of almost a \$200,000 thanks to the money not spent on welfare programs, incarceration and other costs according to the study. In addition preschool helps social mobility, decreasing inequality and make a better use of the human talent for so many Americans. So why preschool education isn't something that Conservatives, Independents and Liberals are rallying around? And isn't this something that both Republicans and Democrats can agree on? Because if we don't more and more people will be loss in a world of increasing global educated competition..... ***And this is my rant of the week....***

WEEK'S READINGS

There's No Such Thing as 'Radical Islam.' There Are Only Terrorists Who Are Muslim



ISIS is about as Islamic as the KKK is Christian. They just use religion. Their real agenda is political. Get with it.

How many Muslims does ISIS have to slaughter before people will stop calling the group "Islamic" anything? Seriously, can someone please tell me the number of innocent Muslim men, women, and children who have to die at the hands of ISIS before people will realize that ISIS is truly unIslamic and arguably anti-Islamic?

On Tuesday, we saw more of ISIS's barbaric brutality on display with the release of the video depicting its killing of Jordanian Muslim fighter pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh. He was flying sorties as part of the U.S.-organized coalition to destroy ISIS.

The way he was killed sets a new low in depravity. ISIS militants first chained Kasasbeh in a cage and then poured flammable fluids into his cell. With Kasasbeh watching, an ISIS militant lit the fluid on fire. Then while Kasasbeh was burning to death, they dropped debris on him, like brick masonry. Finally they drove a bulldozer over him several times.

What makes the killing of this man so noteworthy is not just the viciousness of his execution, but that it actually received national U.S. media coverage. We rarely see our media cover the Muslims killed by ISIS or al Qaeda. I often wonder, is it because some in the media feel that Muslims lives don't matter? Or is it because they sense that collectively, most (though not all) Americans could care less about it when non-Americans are killed, so that translates into low ratings for these types of stories?

To be honest, how many have heard about the details of ISIS slaughtering of Muslims? In 2014 in Iraq alone, can you guess how many Muslims civilians—not fighters, civilians—ISIS killed? At least 4,325. ISIS is murdering an average 12 Muslim civilian men, women, and children every single day.

And these killings are not “collateral damage” deaths. Per a United Nations report released last September, ISIS targeted Muslims, both Sunnis and Shias, who refused to submit to it. We are talking a Sunni leader from the Salah ad Din province of Iraq beheaded (PDF) in August for refusing to swear allegiance to ISIS. Do you recall U.S. media wall-to-wall coverage of that beheading, like when Westerners were beheaded?

Three Sunni nurses were executed in Mosul for refusing to treat ISIS fighters. A Sunni imam in eastern Baquba was killed for simply denouncing ISIS.

And in neighboring Syria, per the London-based Syrian Human Rights Committee, in December 2014 alone, ISIS killed at least 49 civilians, executing almost all in front of their families.

Look, there's no such thing as “radical Islam.” There is only one Islam. But there are radical Muslims. And there are Muslims who engage in terrorist acts. They are called terrorists.

Why do these facts matter? Because I think it makes it clear to any reasonable person that ISIS is not about the tenets of Islam. Their religion is power.

Those aren't just my words. In September, more than 120 Islamic scholars and clerics wrote a letter to ISIS in both English and Arabic denouncing ISIS and its invoking of Islam to justify its horrific actions. They even explained in great detail how ISIS is violating the Quran and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, concluding that ISIS is truly unIslamic.

Yet these words don't move many on the right in America, who continue to argue in essence: If a Muslim yells "Allahu Akbar" after committing any action, that absolutely means that their conduct is based on the faith. That is beyond simplistic—it's idiotic.

And nearly as ludicrous is the claim by people like Republican Sen. Kelly Ayotte, who stated on Fox News on Sunday that we need to call it "radical Islam" because we "have to define our enemy."

Look, there's no such thing as "radical Islam." There is only one Islam. But there are radical Muslims. And there are Muslims who engage in terrorist acts. They are called terrorists. That is the proper way to describe them.

That is exactly what White House Press secretary Josh Earnest stated a few weeks ago when refusing to use the term "radical Islam" to describe al Qaeda or ISIS. As Earnest noted, it's about "accuracy," noting correctly that "these terrorists are individuals who would like to cloak themselves in the veil of a particular religion."

Just read the ISIS magazine and you will see how they desperately seek to frame its battle with the United States as an "American crusade against Islam." (PDF) That is why when Sen. Lindsey Graham recently called the fight with al Qaeda a "religious war," I can only imagine these terrorists were high-fiving each other because he was parroting their words.

Using the word Islam in any way to describe ISIS or al Qaeda, or framing our fight as a religious war, is exactly what they want. It helps them recruit and raise funds. Let's call ISIS — as well as al Qaeda — what they are. They are terrorists with a political agenda who are using the Islamic faith, not acting in accordance with it. That is our enemy. Now let's defeat them.

Dean Obeidallah — 02.06.15 — The Daily Beast

California's Fracking Boom?



Huntington Beach in the 1930s or 1940s.

As most of you know the United States is currently going through a huge oil and gas boom and it was thought that the State of California would join states like Texas, North Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, among others to the current drilling frenzy. For years, the biggest talk in California's energy industry has been about hydraulic fracturing (or fracking) and whether or not the method of pumping sand, chemicals and water at very high pressure to release trapped hydrocarbons will kick off a boom comparable to surging North Dakota. There was a time, just a few years ago, that most news reports deemed a shale oil boom inevitable in California. But now, it's not looking like such a sure thing after all.

In order to understand California's future, a little history lesson helps. Oil was first discovered here by Native Americans. But it wasn't until the 1890s and the beginning of the 1900s that drilling revealed some of the biggest (and still active) oil fields in the Ventura-Santa Barbara coast area, the Los Angeles Basin and the San Joaquin Valley. California became the nation's biggest oil producer, contributing 40 percent to the country's supply in 1914. By 1940 that had fallen to only 17 percent. But production chugged upward, even as supply came from elsewhere, until the state hit its peak – just over a million barrels of oil a day – in 1985. Today, production is 50 percent of what it was in the '80s and California is a distant third to Texas and North Dakota. Technology, though, has helped slow the slide. In order to squeeze the last drops out of very old oil fields or less productive wells in the state, industry has relied on well stimulation techniques, such as fracking and acidizing.

In 2011, the Energy Information Administration all but declared another gold rush in California by proclaiming that the Monterey shale formation and its equivalents, which lie under most of south and central California, held 15.4 billion barrels of technically recoverable oil. To put that number in perspective, that would mean 64 percent of the estimated reserve of shale oil in the lower 48. So, essentially, a colossal pile of black gold. But not everyone bought the hype, including J. David Hughes, a geoscientist and fellow at Post Carbon Institute, who wrote the report ***“Drilling California: A Reality Check on the Monterey Shale.”*** And Hughes will likely get the pleasure of saying *“I told you so.”* Just three years after declaring that there was 15.4 billion barrels of oil, the EIA downgraded its estimate to 600 million barrels, slashing the number by 96 percent.

What went wrong? What proved successful in North Dakota's Bakken shale and Texas' Eagle Ford shale, hasn't translated to California's Monterey shale, which Hughes says has been structurally fragmented. The geology is *“folded, faulted, and shattered at the micro level,”* he says. All that

fragmentation has meant that oil has seeped from some Monterey shale source rock into other reservoirs that have already been drilled for decades and the formation itself contains not just “tight oil” trapped in rocks like the Bakken and Eagle Ford but also conventional reservoirs, which have already been heavily drilled.

Right now it looks unlikely that fracking, or similar techniques, will unleash a bounty here anytime soon, barring a technological breakthrough we can't see yet, says Hughes. The industry has been trying for decades with not much to show for it. “*Fracking and acidizing have been tried extensively on Monterey shale wells, yet the data do not show any significant increase in well productivity or likely cumulative oil recovery for recent wells,*” wrote Hughes in his “**Drilling California**” Report. “*Geology beats technology every time,*” he says. “*In the final analysis geology always wins.*”

Where fracking has unleashed a boom elsewhere, in California it has merely prolonged a waning industry. John Kemp, a market analysis for Reuters, writes in a recent column that, “*the shale revolution has bypassed the state.*” Instead of unlocking the chimerical bounty of the Monterey shale's tight oil, fracking in California has been more effective at tapping more conventional reserves and increasing recovery on lagging wells. It's a useful tool for industry — as well as a concern for environmental and health groups worried about air and water pollution, among other risks.

Today 20 percent of production in California comes from fracked wells. And half of new wells being drilled in the state are also being fracked. The vast majority of these wells are in the San Joaquin Valley, mostly western Kern County, which may suffer a blow as the market price of a barrel of oil has plummeted 60 percent since June. “*California's oil industry is being hit harder than any other state by falling prices because of the comparatively poor quality of its crude and its aging fields,*” explains Kemp. “*California's high-cost and low-productivity oil industry has always been vulnerable to falling prices.*”

The market crash will mostly impact new wells, and not current production. Although, Hughes says, the price fall could mean that companies may cease production on some “*stripper wells,*” which are marginal wells that yield 15 barrels or less a day. As of 2009, California had more than 30,000 stripper wells, and the number was climbing fast. Already the price plunge is having a negative effect. One of the indicators used to assess activity in oilfields is how many rigs are currently being used. The rig count for California in mid-January had fallen by more than half compared to a month before.

Additionally, there is also growing public outcry as drilling rigs have been erected next to schools, in National Forests, in urban and suburban neighborhoods, along prized beaches, and in some of the country's most economically productive farmland. In the last few years a concerted effort of environmental and community groups has focused on pushing the legislature to enact statewide and local moratoria on fracking, but so far few have arrived. Instead, California has opted to regulate the practice and agreed to conduct some studies to assess the potential environmental impacts.

This has ignited more activity at the local level. Both Santa Cruz County and Mendocino County banned fracking last year, although neither are active areas of the oil industry — victories, however symbolic. San Benito County, however, also voted in November to ban fracking and other “*high intensity*” oil production methods as it was set to be the site of potentially hundreds of new wells for an

oil recovery project using cyclic steaming, a kind of enhanced recovery technique where the rock is heated in order to move viscous oil.

In Santa Barbara County, which has an active oil industry, environmental groups tried to pass a ballot measure similar to San Benito, but the measure was defeated after the industry spent \$7 million during the lead-up to the election. In Los Angeles, where oil production still occurs in densely packed urban neighborhoods, city council members are pushing for a moratorium or severe controls despite threats of a lawsuit from the Western States Petroleum Association. It's possible that that due to growing public pressure, like the State of New York, fracking could be ban ending any chance of there being another oil boom in California.

Four Words & The GOP's Dream

Which will hurt millions of Americans



Americans are often appalled when an offender escapes punishment due to a technicality. So when I saw the head line of an op-ed by Conservative columnist George Will titled – **George F. Will: Four words in the ACA could spell its doom** – it sparked my interest. Like most Americans I am not familiar with **King v. Burwell**, the Supreme Court case designed to demolish the Affordable Care Act. More than 52 different parties have weighed in with briefs in advance of oral arguments on March 4.

Of those, 21 have been filed on behalf of the plaintiffs, who claim millions of Obamacare consumers are receiving illegal health insurance subsidies. And if they are successful, Americans will go back to the days when insurance companies could refuse coverage because of an individual's preexisting condition, when insurance companies could deny certain treatment and anyone who got sick before getting health insurance were S#*t out of luck.

The four words that threaten disaster for the ACA say the subsidies shall be available to persons who purchase health insurance in an exchange "**established by the state**". But 34 states have

chosen not to establish exchanges. The thing about this is that state exchanges was a compromise given to Conservatives who strongly believe in state's rights. And the Big Ugly is that depending on how the Supreme Court decides millions of Americans could lose their healthcare insurance hurting middle class and poor families.

In addition to the Supreme Court, we just got a glimpse of what would happen to our health care system if Republicans increase their control of Congress and win the White House in 2016. Gone would be the part of Obamacare that Americans tell pollsters they don't like: the requirement that they enroll in some kind of health plan or pay a penalty that grows more severe every year. In addition, the GOP would get rid of the provision mandating that employers with more than 50 workers offer subsidized coverage. And the GOP would also eliminate the existing parts of the law protecting us from insurance company practices that used to keep millions of us in the ranks of the uninsured and underinsured -- and just an illness or accident away from financial ruin.

Of course the sponsors of the Republican alternative -- called the Patient Choice, Affordability, Responsibility and Empowerment Act -- or Patient CARE -- don't spin it that way. In fact, the language they use makes their plan sound like a simple, common sense, no-brainer alternative to the Affordable Care Act (aka Obamacare.) *"We can lower costs and expand access to quality coverage and care by empowering individuals and their families to make their own health care decisions, rather than having the federal government make those decisions for them,"* said Sen. Richard M. Burr (R-North Carolina), one of the three authors of the plan. The others are Sen. Orrin Hatch, (R-Utah), who now chairs the Senate Finance Committee, and Fred Upton (R-Michigan.), the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman.

As always, though, the devil is in the details. The reality is that the GOP plan would take us back to the days when insurers could sell junk policies, charge older folks more than they can today and calculate premiums based on a person's health status. This means that a breast cancer survivor or a diabetic or someone recovering from a heart attack -- or even a young person born with a disability or congenital disease -- would have to pay a fortune for decent coverage if, God forbid, they let their existing policy lapse for two months or longer.

The Republican sponsors say their plan would restore freedom of choice they claim was taken away by Obamacare. There is some truth to that. The Affordable Care Act requires health insurance policies to cover 10 essential benefits, ranging from preventive care to prescription drugs and a stay in the hospital. People no longer have the freedom to buy policies so skimpy they have to pay almost all of their medical bills out of their own pockets. The Patient CARE Act would restore that freedom. And it would also restore to insurance companies the freedom to set annual limits on coverage.

The health insurance exchanges would disappear in most if not all states because the federal funding to help run them would evaporate under the GOP plan. One of the benefits of the exchanges is the ability it gives us to shop online for coverage and compare features and costs of one plan versus another. Health insurance agents and brokers would probably love to see those features disappear, but their gain would be our loss.

To increase competition, the GOP lawmakers say they would allow insurers to sell coverage across state lines. They made no mention of the fact that health insurance is regulated largely at the state level and that federal law doesn't bar insurers from crossing state lines today.

The Medicaid expansion under Obamacare would also go away, as would the federal subsidies available to help low-income families and individuals pay their premiums and cover some of their out-of-pocket expenses. Under the GOP plan, the states would receive block grants from the federal government to help finance their Medicaid programs, meaning the feds would have far less say as to how the states provide coverage to the poor.

The GOP plan would also provide aid only to people making up to three times the federal poverty level -- and in the form of refundable tax credits -- as opposed to four times the poverty level via federal subsidies under Obamacare. As a result, many -- probably millions -- of low- to moderate-income people who were able to buy coverage as a result of Obamacare would once again find the cost of health insurance prohibitively expensive.

Many folks in their 40s, 50s and early 60s would also be dumped back into the ranks of the uninsured or underinsured. Against the wishes of insurance industry lobbyists, Congress restricted insurers' ability to charge older folks more than three times as much as younger people for the exact same coverage when it passed Obamacare. The industry wanted to be able to charge them at least five times as much. The GOP plan would grant that wish.

It's important to note that the Patient CARE Act is not really a piece of legislation. If it were a bill instead of just a "vision," as Burr, Hatch and Upton refer to their ideas, the Congressional Budget Office would have to assess the effect it would have on the budget and our health care system. That would not be pretty. So don't expect the Patient CARE Act to become a bill anytime soon. And remember that the plaintiff behind King v. Burwell recently called President Obama the "Antichrist" which strongly suggest that this opposition is not about healthcare, state's right or Constitutional freedom.... It is much deeper and ugly and to think that it is not to be naive....

I was told that salt was bad for us and now maybe not...



Smoking, cliff diving, dancing in traffic ... Certain things are proven health hazards. But after tobacco products, salt may be public health enemy No. 1.

It's not just a matter of bad reputation. According to a study from 2010, cutting back on salt could save as many or more lives as cutting back on tobacco would. The idea is that too much salt will jack up your blood pressure and increase your risk of heart attack, which everyone agrees is bad for your health. It may come as a shock, then, that there is a fierce ongoing debate among scientists about whether or not salt is actually bad for you.

Turns out the case against salt is not as much of a slam dunk as the medical guidelines make it seem. For example, some studies show that higher salt intake results in lower risk of death due to cardiovascular problems, while others tell us that eating too little salt will kill you just as dead as eating too much. Still others will tell you that, at least where blood pressure is concerned, your salt intake doesn't matter at all. Yeah, you read that right — some studies say that salt has zero effect on your blood pressure.

The real danger might come not from your saltshaker, but rather from processed foods.

To be sure, there are methodological problems with some of these studies. For example, people who are eating a low-sodium diet might be doing so because they are already sick, making it look like their low sodium intake caused their health problems, when in fact they got on the low-salt diet because of their health problems (a phenomenon known as reverse causation). Furthermore, these studies contradict many others that say salt really is dangerous. However, in no area is the science bad enough, or the evidence overwhelming enough, to make a final determination either way.

But if the evidence is so imperfect, why is salt so thoroughly maligned by the medical establishment? Some public health bigwigs think that it might be more about market share than making people healthy. Specifically, in the '60s and '70s, when the anti-sodium movement was picking up steam, companies started marketing low-sodium products (specifically baby food) to take advantage of a fresh niche. Before there was enough evidence to conclusively convict salt as a public health villain, the mineral had already gained a terrible reputation.

Does this inconclusive evidence give you carte blanche to curl up with a salt lick? Sorry, no. But if you have been struggling to cut back, you could be in luck. The real danger might come not from your saltshaker, but rather from processed foods. Most of them, especially sauces and spreads, have an astonishingly large amount of sodium. If you make your food at home, it's probably fine to sprinkle in some salt if ██████ like — it is an essential nutrient, after all, key in many processes related to blood, nerves, and even movement. If you add salt to your TV dinners, well ... you're probably not reading stories on public health. On the off chance you are, consider unhanding the white stuff. Salt is probably not up there with the Grim Reaper, but you can still have too much of a good thing.

Benjamin Spoer – February 6, 2015

How Often People in Various Countries Shower

Amidst the no-shampoo revolution, a look at global hygiene habits



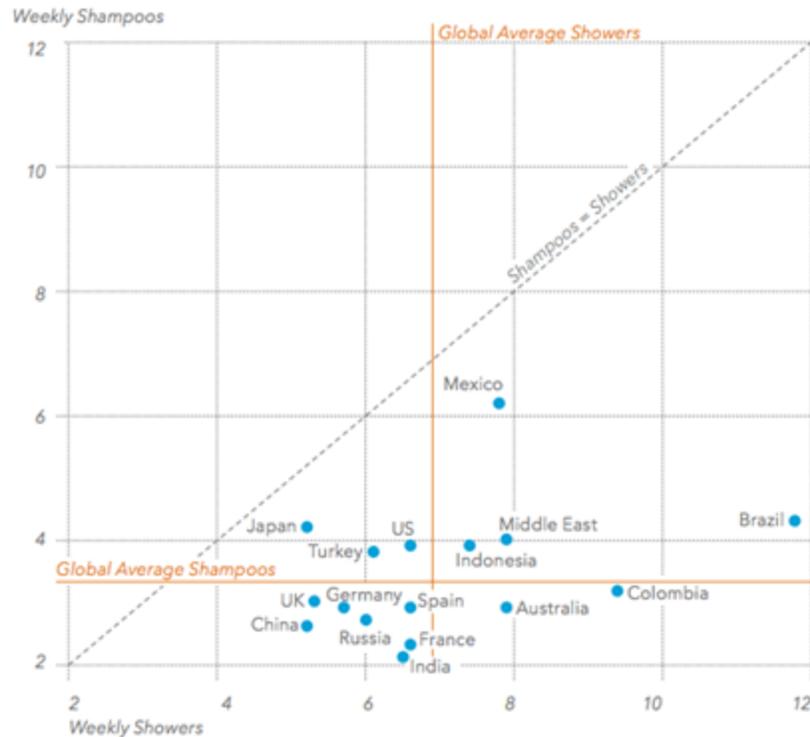
Having grown up in the 1950s where not everyone in my neighborhood had a bath tub and then traveling to Europe for the first time to find that there were public baths in wide use, I found Olga Khazan's article – ***How Often People in Various Countries Shower*** – in ***The Atlantic***.... Interesting to say the least. But before I talk about that, in the article I was directed to another article in ***Gizmodo*** by Sarah Zhang – ***How "Clean" Was Sold to America with Fake Science*** – which I found truly interesting and wrote about in last week's offerings....

Cleanliness, it turns out, has been one dirty trick. One reason early-20th-century Americans ramped up their weekly baths to daily showers is that marketing companies capitalized on the insecurities of a new class of office drones working in close quarters. As I wrote last week's offerings, to sell products like "toilet soap" and Listerine to Americans, *"the advertising industry had to create pseudoscientific maladies like 'bad breath' and 'body odor.'"* Take, for instance, Gizmodo's description of the philosophy of the Cleanliness Institute, which was founded by the Association of American Soap and Glycerine Producers:

The trade association wanted Americans to to wash quite unwittingly after toilet, to wash without thought before eating, to jump into the tub as automatically as one might awake each new day.

And so we did. A **Reddit** user recently polled 562 people and found that most men said they showered daily. Women's bathing rituals were more diffuse, but about 60 percent preferred to shower three, four, or five times weekly. Now is the dawn of a new, more pungent era, though. People are snapping up dry shampoo and No-Poo and coating themselves in bacteria. Dr. Sanjay Jain recently told Jezebel that *"showers don't need to be too hot, or too long, and you should always pat dry, rather than rub, to avoid irritating your skin."* One family went six months without using soap and raved about the results.

Average Showers and Shampoos by Country



But as it turns out, Americans aren't alone when it comes to having overdone it with too-frequent showers and shampoos. A **Euromonitor** poll from July found that Americans are fairly average when it comes to hygiene. Among the 16 regions surveyed, Americans attested to showering more frequently than the Chinese, Brits, and Japanese, where respondents said they take about five showers per week, but not nearly as often as people in Brazil and Colombia, where people seemingly sometimes take more than one shower per day.

Perhaps the warm climates play a role — though that wouldn't explain the habits of balmy, relatively-infrequently-bathing Turkey and Spain. It's interesting, too, that in most countries people don't shampoo every time they shower. Mexicans and Japanese people come closest to fully sanitizing their hair each time. In general, the world's women shower more than men. The exception, according to a 2008 study by hygiene-products company SCA, is Sweden, the only country surveyed where men were more likely to shower every day than women.

THIS WEEK'S QUOTE

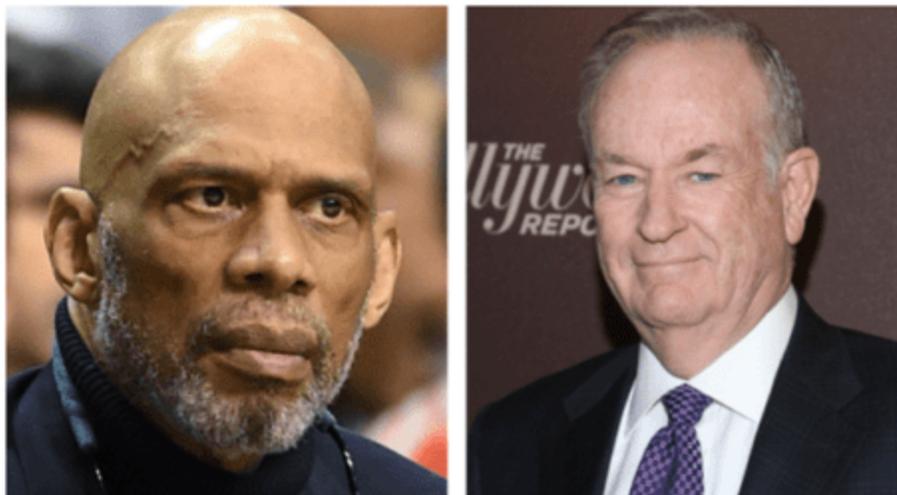
“I thought that if the President had come (to the Prayer Breakfast) as an atheist to attack religion or to attack Christianity the Republicans would have a point, that's not what a President should be doing. But that is not how he came. He has used the Prayer

Breakfast year after year to talk about his own faith, his own faith journey and his own struggles. He came as a Christian. And the things that he said I have never met a Christian who disagreed with what he said, that the religion has been perverted, that we have to walk humbly before the face of the Lord, that God's purposes are mysterious to us. This is not some tangential weird belief. This is the core of every Christian's faith or every Jew's faith. And so what he said is utterly normally admirable and a recognition of historical fact and an urge towards some humility. So I thought that the protests were manufactured and falsely manufactured.”

David Brooks speaking to Judy Woodruff on Republicans backlash over Obama's comments at the Prayer Breakfast on February 5, 2015

BEST VIDEO OF THE WEEK

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar schools Bill O'Reilly in 'Meet the Press' interview on Islam



Former NBA star Kareem Abdul-Jabbar continued his by-proxy debate with Fox News host Bill O'Reilly over Muslim extremist violence Sunday morning, arguing that economic and political disenfranchisement led to violent groups that wear a “Muslim mask.”

“It feels good to just blame the religion,” Abdul-Jabbar said on Meet the Press. “But the causes go a lot deeper.”

Previously, Abdul-Jabbar had written an op-ed piece in which he drew parallels between the radical Islamic violence seen today and the rampant violence of the KKK and its ties to Christianity.

Watch Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's segment on 'Meet the Press' below:

Web Link: <http://youtu.be/99YFQzpUlc4>

THIS WEEK'S MUSIC

Blake Shelton



I really hadn't heard of **Blake Shelton** until I watched the premiere of NBC's singing competition series **The Voice** and although I was not a fan of Country Music which is his musical genre I quickly became a fan of his. On Shelton's website it says that he is many things. "He is the hugely popular coach on the top-rated television music competition show **The Voice**, where singers he's mentored have won three of six seasons. He has three RIAA certified Platinum albums, five RIAA certified Gold albums, 17 total No. 1 country singles, 7.6 million albums and 22.8 million singles sold, and a *four-year run* as reigning **CMA Male Vocalist of the Year**. He's the charismatic live entertainer performing to packed houses in arenas, amphitheaters and stadiums across the country. He's husband to country superstar Miranda Lambert, together inspiring endless public fascination as country's "*Power Couple*." But what is truly endearing about Shelton is his down-home folksy "*ah shucks*" laid-back demeanor that makes it hard to distinguish whether his love for country music or forwarding members of his team or encouraging contestants in the other teams is more important. As the least know host to mainstream audiences at the start of series he has become the breakout star of the show as a result of his earnest and warm coaching style with a twinge of country wit.

Blake Tollison Shelton (born in Ada, Oklahoma on June 18, 1976) is an American country music singer and television personality. In 2001, he made his debut with the single "**Austin**". The lead-off single from his self-titled debut album, "*Austin*" spent five weeks at *Number One* on the **Billboard Hot Country Songs** chart. The gold-certified debut album also produced two more Top 20 hits ("*All Over Me*" and "*Ol' Red*"). Although the album was released on Giant Records Nashville, he was transferred to Warner Bros. Records Nashville after Giant closed in late 2001.

His second and third albums, 2003's *The Dreamer* and 2004's Blake Shelton's *Barn & Grill*, were each certified gold as well. His fourth album, *Pure BS* (2007), was re-issued in 2008 with a cover of Michael Bublé's pop hit "*Home*" as one of the bonus tracks fifth album, *Startin' Fires*, which had an appearance by his then-girlfriend Miranda Lambert, was released in November 2008. It was followed by the extended plays *Hillbilly Bone* and *All About Tonight* in 2010, and the albums *Red River Blue* in 2011. *Based on a True Story...* in 2013, and *Bringing Back the Sunshine* in 2014. Overall, Blake Shelton has charted 24 country singles, including 11 number ones. The 11th No. 1 ("*Doin' What She Likes*") broke "*the record for the most consecutive No. 1 singles in the Country Airplay chart's 24-year history*". He is a five-time **Grammy Award** nominee. In addition to *The Voice*, Shelton is also known for his role as a judge on the televised singing competitions **Nashville Star** and **Clash of the Choirs**. He has been on **The Voice** since its inception, and four out of the seven seasons (2–4, 7) his teams have won. With this said, I invite you to enjoy the music of Mr. Blake Shelton my favorite Country artist and one of my new favorite musical stars..... And please enjoy the bonus track featuring the judges from season four of **The Voice** singing "*With A Little Help From My Friends*"....

Blake Shelton – **Austin** -- <http://youtu.be/bb1DTsxBOfE>

Blake Shelton – **Don't Make Me** -- <http://youtu.be/ZtBgkT2Sjzc>

Blake Shelton ft. Pistol Anniés & Friends – **Boys 'Round Here** -- <http://youtu.be/JXAgv665J14>

Blake Shelton – **Home** -- <http://youtu.be/kkoT1nZOexY>

Blake Shelton – **Who Are You When I'm Not Looking** – Live at the Grand Ole Opry -- <http://youtu.be/l-LKmv0oeTM>

Blake Shelton featuring Ashley Monroe – **Lonely Tonight** -- <http://youtu.be/G91KZ56mNbw>

Blake Shelton – **Kiss My Country Ass** -- <http://youtu.be/PJe754cLbok>

Blake Shelton – **Neon Light** -- <http://youtu.be/7yTKBwoVKqE>

Blake Shelton – **Over** -- <http://youtu.be/8tpctFgADu4>

Blake Shelton – **Mine Would Be You** -- <http://youtu.be/9JkdBnT7j2I>

Blake Shelton feat. Trace Adkins – **Hillbilly Bone** -- <http://youtu.be/OGoiwxTWeE>

Blake Shelton – **Sure Be Cool If You Did** -- <http://youtu.be/kXmmXAUqfd8>

Blake Shelton – **Footloose** -- <http://youtu.be/1mzpuUzLKx4>

Blake Shelton – **Honey Bee** – Live at the Grand Ole Opry -- <http://youtu.be/CXMvuB4oon8>

Blake Shelton & Jake Worthington – **A Country Boy Can Survive** -- <http://youtu.be/HVqZ9ENa390>

Blake Shelton & Shakira – **Medicine** -- <http://youtu.be/F1rAVitAwiA>

Blake Shelton & Miranda Lambert – **Home – Live at the Grand Ole Opry** --
<http://youtu.be/IIAJAPI2Rck>

Christina Aguilera & Blake Shelton – **Just A Fool** -- http://youtu.be/xkR_uIHhsqM

Usher, Shakira, Blake Shelton & Adam Levine – **With a Little Help from My Friends** – The
Voice -- <http://youtu.be/ijaB4tBREhs>

*I hope that you enjoyed this week's offering and wish you and
yours a great week....*

Sincerely,

Greg Brown

--

Gregory Brown
Chairman & CEO
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