



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #272 — NOV. 19, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org> FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com

INDEX: Click here.

Rich and Poor

(posted by Pam McRae and SteveG, Nov. 19, 2012)

This is very important information. Why aren't the Democrats pounding this home at every opportunity? We see commercials all the time about how fracking is going to change our world, provide jobs, clean up the environment, and decrease our dependency on foreign oil. I take that with a grain of salt, but those commercials are ubiquitous. Why can't some Democratic interest groups make some commercials of their own? You have to pound something into people's heads if you want to change attitudes. What ever happened to the public service announcement? Why couldn't there be little 30 sec. bits about the facts cited here? Lots of little bits, lots of the time. Build a ground swell. Why doesn't Al Gore take some of his money and that of his friends and put out slick commercials about global warming etc. etc.? There's a need here that's not being filled. Why doesn't Warren Buffet subsidize some commercials that say, Hire a vet? —Pam McRae



"5 Ways Most Americans Are Blind to How Their Country Is Stacked for the Wealthy" by Paul Bucheit, AlterNet

Nov. 15, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/economy/5-ways-most-americans-are-blind-how-their-country-stacked-wealthy>)

Mitt Romney said he wasn't concerned about the very poor, because they have a safety net. This is typical of the widespread ignorance about inequality in our country. Struggling Americans want jobs, not handouts, and for the most part they've paid for their "safety net." The real problem is at the other end of the wealth gap.

How many people know that **out of 150 countries, we have the fourth-highest wealth disparity? Only Zimbabwe, Namibia and Switzerland are worse.**

It's not just economic inequality that's plaguing our country, it's lack of opportunity. It's a dismissal of poor people as lazy, or as threats to society. More than any other issue over the next four years, we need to address the growing divide in our nation, to tone down our winner-take-all philosophy, to provide job opportunities for people who want to contribute to society.

Here are some of the common misconceptions.

1. Americans believe that the poorest 40 percent own about 10% of the wealth.

Most people greatly underestimate the level of inequality in our country, guessing that the poorest 40 percent own about 10% of the wealth, when in reality they own much less than 1% of the wealth. Out of every dollar, they own a third of a penny.

Factor in race and it gets worse. Much of minority wealth exists in home values. But housing crashed, while the financial wealth owned almost entirely (93% of it) by the richest quintile of Americans has rebounded to lofty pre-recession levels.

As a result, for every dollar of non-home wealth owned by white families, people of color have only 1 cent. Median wealth for a single white woman is over \$40,000. For black and Hispanic women it is a little over \$100.

2. Entitlements are the problem.

No, they're not. The evidence is overwhelming. Social Security is a popular and well-run program. As summarized by Bernie Sanders, "Social Security, which is funded by the payroll tax, has not contributed one nickel to the deficit, and according to its trustees, can pay 100 percent of all benefits owed to every eligible American for the next 21 years." Dean Baker calls it "perhaps the greatest success story of any program in US history."

Medicare, which is largely without the profit motive and the competing sources of billing, is efficiently run, for all eligible Americans. According to the Council for Affordable Health Insurance, medical administrative costs as a percentage of claims are about three times higher for private insurance than for Medicare. And it's just as popular as Social Security.

3. Welfare benefits are a drag on the economy.

Critics bemoan the amounts of aid being lavished on lower-income Americans, making dubious claims about thousands of dollars going to every poor family. But despite an ever-growing need for jobs and basic living necessities, federal spending on poverty programs is a small part of the budget, and it's been that way for almost 50 years, increasing from 0.8 percent of GDP in 1962 to 1.2 percent of GDP in 2007.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) has dropped significantly over the past 15 years, leaving benefit levels far below the poverty line for most families. Ninety percent of the available benefits go to the

elderly, the disabled or working households. For each family, current federal budgets pay about \$400 per month for food, housing, and traditional "welfare" programs. Food stamp recipients get \$4.30 a day.

4. The American Dream is still alive, if you just work hard enough.

The Horatio Alger tale has been a popular one for conservatives, but the OECD, the Economic Policy Institute and the *National Journal* all came to the same conclusion: the future earnings of a child in the U.S. is closely correlated to the earnings of his or her parents. This lack of mobility is more prevalent in the U.S. than in almost all other OECD countries.

Only 4 percent of those raised in the bottom quintile make it to the top quintile as adults. Only about 20 percent even make it to the top half.

A big part of the problem is the severe degree of poverty for our nation's children. According to UNICEF, among industrialized countries only Romania has a higher child poverty rate than the United States. Just in the last 10 years the number of impoverished American children increased by 30 percent.

And it's much worse for minorities. While 12 percent of white children live in poverty, 35 percent of Hispanic children and 39% of black children start their lives in conditions that make simple survival more important than the American Dream. Eighty percent of black children who started in or near the top half of U.S. income levels experienced downward mobility later in life.

5. Prison puts away the bad guys.

Despite a falling violent crime rate in the U.S., there are now, as noted by Adam Gopnik, "more people under 'correctional supervision' in America -- more than six million -- than were in the Gulag Archipelago under Stalin at its height."

Almost half of the inmates in federal prisons were jailed for drug offenses. Between 1980 and 2003, the number of drug offenders in prison or jail increased by 1100% from 41,100 in 1980 to 493,800 in 2003. African Americans constituted 53.5 percent of all persons who entered prison because of a drug conviction. In the nation's largest cities, drug arrests for African Americans rose at three times the rate for whites from 1980 to 2003.

In Washington, DC, it is estimated that three out of four young black men will serve time in prison. In New York, with 50,000 marijuana arrests per year, 90% are black or Latino. In Seattle, the 8% black population accounts for 60 percent of the arrests. Over the last 10 years Colorado police have arrested Latinos at 1.5 times the rate of whites, and blacks at over three times the rate of whites. Newly passed marijuana laws reflect the beginnings of a backlash.

Perversely, this is all happening as studies by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration find that both black and Hispanic adolescents use drugs less than the general population. And a study by the National Institute of Health shows that the prevalence of marijuana use in colleges and universities was highest for white students.

The greatest misconception: The rich are being soaked.

Redistribution has not spread the wealth, it has concentrated the wealth. Conservative estimates say the richest 1% have doubled their share of America's income in 30 years. It's worse. From 1980 to 2006, the richest 1% actually tripled their share of after-tax income.

The real problem is tax avoidance: lost revenue from tax expenditures (deferrals and deductions), corporate tax avoidance, and tax haven losses could pay off the entire deficit. But the very rich refuse to pay. They have their own safety net in the House of Representatives.

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<u>20121118-01</u>	07:50	MarthaH	"Low Mississippi River Water Levels May Halt Barges"
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<u>20121118-04</u>	13:30	SteveB	"Driving America's 85 MPH Toll Road before the Fun Gets Old"
<u>20121118-11</u>	23:58	Marci	Cool Photos #9 (The Inhabited Volcanic Island of Aogashima)
<u>20121118-12</u>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Mississippi River near St. Louis

<u>20121116-01</u>	11:01	Pam	Re: "A Few Words for My Republican Friends" (reply to Art, FotM Newsletter #271)
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Did you all see the lame clip of Romney trying to explain that he really does care about the 100%? He doesn't get it, and he never will. And there's Bill O'Reilly and Co. bemoaning the shrinking number of white Americans as compared to immigrants and African Americans. I thought that kind of thinking went out with men wearing spats. The rich really are different from us, and everyone on Fox News is a moron. I just love the list of "giveaways" that Obama presumably used to bribe voters into electing him. Everything on the list is stuff I WANT. So what's the problem? These people have taken selfishness to a whole new level, and you know what they say about pride.

<u>20121116-02</u>	12:48	Ben	Fw: Petition: For Austin to Secede from Texas
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Make sure you have read this carefully enough...

from Charlie

Please sign this petition to have Austin secede from Texas:

<http://wh.gov/9o7w>.

As of tonite (just now) they have almost 7,500 petitions (need to have 25,000 by Dec 12th) to get the White House to officially respond to the petition:

Austin Texas continues to suffer difficulties stemming from the lack of civil, religious, and political freedoms imposed upon the city by less liberally minded Texans," the petition reads. "It is entirely feasible for Austin to operate as its own state, within the United States, in the event that Texas is successful in the current bid to secede. It is important for Austin to remain in the union as to do so would protect its citizens' standard of living and re-secure their rights and liberties in accordance with the original ideas and beliefs of our founding fathers.

[20121116-03](#) 13:36 GaryC Hostess

Hostess is closing its doors. There is a run on all Hostess products at stores. The good news, if you can find them, Twinkies will last for 50 years.

[20121116-04](#) 13:39 SteveB Re: Hostess (reply to GaryC, above)

Twinkies lasting 50 years. Haha. I found stale ones a lot, not even expired.

Hostess going out of business??? NO, NO, NO!!!

Why didn't y'all buy more???? Love their products. Always have. Best of kind. (Though it's a weird little chemically kind. Delicious!) Wonder Bread is wonderful!

[20121117-03](#) 14:07 SteveB "Petition Wants Obama to Save Twinkies"

"Petition Wants Obama to Save Twinkies" by Byron Tau, Politico

Nov. 16, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/politico44/2012/11/petition-wants-obama-to-save-twinkies-149789.html>)



A new White House petition wants President Obama to nationalize the "Twinkie industry," saving the popular junk food from possible extinction.

"We the undersigned, hereby request Barack Obama to immediately Nationalize the Twinkie industry and prevent our nation from losing her sweet creamy center," a petition on the White House "We the People" website requests.

Hostess Brands Inc. — maker of the Twinkie, the Ding Dong and Wonder Bread — is preparing to shutter operations amid a labor strike and rising costs. Unionized workers rejected a major pay and benefit cut, sparking the latest strike.

Labor leaders say the standoff represents "Bain-style" vulture capitalism — a reference to former GOP nominee Mitt Romney's private equity firm.

"What's happening with Hostess Brands is a microcosm of what's wrong with America, as Bain-style Wall Street vultures make themselves rich by making America poor. Crony capitalism and consistently poor management drove Hostess into the ground, but its workers are paying the price," AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka said in a Friday statement.

A full shutdown of the company could result in as many as 18,000 job losses — though it's possible a buyer could be found for some of its dozens of brands.

The White House petition was posted Friday. It needs 25,000 signatures to generate an official White House response.

P.S. Another good reference is this gallery of photos of Hostess products. Yummy!

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/16/hostess-liquidation_n_2146045.html?utm_hp_ref=mostpopular

20121118-02	09:02	SteveB	"R.I.P., Twinkies"
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"R.I.P., Twinkies" by Daniel Gross, The Daily Beast

Nov. 17, 2012, (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/11/17/what-really-did-in-america-s-favorite-guilty-pleasure.html>)

(What really did in America's favorite guilty pleasure?)

For anyone who remembers the days before schoolkids ate free-range chicken wraps and kale chips, reading the news Hostess Brands posted on its website Nov. 16 was like watching Howdy Doody get strangled: the 82-year-old company, which makes Wonder Bread, Twinkies, and other triumphs of American food engineering, would shut down immediately and ask a bankruptcy court to let it hold a fire sale on everything it owns.

Hostess CEO Rayburn blamed a labor dispute, but a failure to keep pace with artisanal times helped doom the celebrated snack cakes. (Jonathan Alpeyrie / Polaris)

The proximate cause? The Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union, which represents about 5,000 Hostess Brands workers, wouldn't sign off on the bankrupt company's latest reorganization plan and had gone on strike Nov. 12. Claiming that the company lacked "the financial resources to weather an extended nationwide strike," CEO Gregory F. Rayburn said in a statement that "Hostess Brands will move promptly to lay off most of its 18,500-member workforce and focus on selling its assets to the highest bidders."

At first blush, the brinksmanship over Twinkies—Twinksmanship?—was a case of junk bonds meeting junk food and producing a junky result. The parent company first went into Chapter 11 in 2004, where it stayed for more than four years before emerging under private-equity ownership. Rechristened Hostess Brands, it made a return trip to Chapter 11 in January 2012, laboring under a \$700 million debt load.

The new owners—hedge funds that had purchased the company’s debt—brought in Rayburn, who sought to cut employees’ wages and reduce pension and 401(k) contributions. In exchange for concessions on work rules, benefits, and compensation, the unions were to receive a 25 percent stake in the company, board representation, and a \$100 million IOU. Several unions, including the Teamsters, signed off. But the bakers held out.

Hostess Brands is a story of what happens when businesses—be they large companies or small firms—focus too much on financial engineering to the detriment of innovation. Hostess, Dolly Madison, Ho Hos, Sno Balls, Twinkies, Wonder Bread—all have a Proustian effect on consumers of a certain age.

But the product line didn’t keep up with a change in the zeitgeist. “Now we are in midst of a food revolution focused on local, organic, artisanal, and authentic—the very antithesis of Twinkies,” says Marion Nestle, a nutrition expert at New York University.

For many U.S. consumer brands, producing overseas, with local labor and for local tastes, has been a way to change their cost structure, to grow, and to cash in on the rapidly expanding consumer markets of China and India. Yet here again, Hostess was stuck with a 1950s worldview. Even though its products are loaded with preservatives, which means they can endure arduous travel to distant markets, Hostess does very little exporting.

The unwillingness or inability to update its business strategy and products for a changing world was more damaging to Hostess than the brief strike this month. A white-bread manufacturer that focuses solely on the U.S. market in 2012 is a little like a white-bread GOP candidate who focuses only on white voters in 2012.

20121118-05	17:38	Art	“Hostess Blames Union for Bankruptcy after Tripling CEO’s Pay”
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Anybody else note this? And they blame the unions???

[“Hostess Blames Union for Bankruptcy after Tripling CEO’s Pay” by Annie-Rose Strasser, ThinkProgress](#)

Nov. 16, 2012, (<http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2012/11/16/1203151/why-unions-dont-shoulder-the-blame-for-hostesss-downfall/>)

Today, Hostess Brands, Inc. — the company famed for its sickly sweet dessert snacks like Twinkies and Sno Balls — announced they’d be shuttering after more than eighty years of production.

But while headlines have been quick to blame unions for the downfall of the company there’s actually more to the story: While the company was filing for bankruptcy, for the second time, earlier this year, it actually tripled its CEO’s pay, and increased other executives’ compensation by as much as 80 percent.

At the time, creditors warned that the decision signaled an attempt to “sidestep” bankruptcy rules, potentially as a means for trying to keep the executive at a failing company. The Confectionery, Tobacco Workers & Grain Millers International Union pointed this out in their written reaction to the news that the business is closing:

BCTGM members are well aware that as the company was preparing to file for bankruptcy earlier this year, the then CEO of Hostess was awarded a 300 percent raise (from approximately \$750,000 to \$2,550,000) and at least nine other top executives of the company received massive pay raises. One such executive received a pay increase from \$500,000 to \$900,000 and another received one taking his salary from \$375,000 to \$656,256.

Certainly, the company agreed to an out-sized pension debt, but the decision to pay executives more while scorning employee contracts during a bankruptcy reflects a lack of good managerial judgement.

It also follows a trend of rising CEO pay in times of economic difficulty. At the manufacturing company Caterpillar, for example, they froze workers’ pay while boosting their CEO’s pay to \$17 million. And at Citigroup, CEO Vikram

Pandit received \$6.7 million for crashing his company, walking off with \$260 million after the business lost 88 percent of its value.

20121118-08	21:32	SteveG	Re: "Hostess Blames Union for Bankruptcy after Tripling CEO's Pay" (reply to Art, above)
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I heard the 300% raise for the CEO, but not the dollar amount or about the others. Did hear that the union gave major concessions during the previous contract negotiations.

20121118-06	20:02	Pam	Re: "Hostess Blames Union for Bankruptcy after Tripling CEO's Pay" (reply to Art, above)
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This is obscene and it's going on right in front of our faces. These people have no shame. How on earth do they justify this to themselves? I really thought we were better than this, but, no, we're just the same old greedy, selfish, arrogant people we've always been--going back to the days of the Robber Barons. And they say money doesn't corrupt. We shouldn't have to have laws against this sort of exploitation and greed; people should be more ethical. I've been hearing about how *homo sapiens* annihilated the Neanderthals. Maybe because they were gentler, and we were more rapacious? What good are our big brains if we just use them against each other?

20121118-07	20:14	Art	Re: "Hostess Blames Union for Bankruptcy after Tripling CEO's Pay" (reply to Pam, above)
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It is indeed just all about greed. What is amazing is how the greedy are able to foist it off on someone else. Just amazing.

I continue to be amazed how they Republicans keep trying to make something out of Benghazi. By now they are all focused on what if anything there Administration knew and when. But they warp it in concern for the dead Americans, which they aren't even trying to investigate - because there is nothing there, of course. . What utter hypocrites.

The logical explanation is Romney had one of his Billionaire secret super PAC donors slip a few million to one of the Libyan militias to knock off the Consulate in order to embarrass the President just prior to the election. You may all recall how he cast blame the same evening that the attack occurred. Almost like he already knew. Everyone seems to have forgotten that now. The fact that the Ambassador was there and got caught up in it was probably coincidental and not part of Romney's original plan.

20121118-09	21:37	SteveG	Re: "Hostess Blames Union for Bankruptcy after Tripling CEO's Pay" (reply to Pam, above)
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Ben and Jerry's is one company that maintains an appropriate ratio between the highest paid and the lowest paid staff.



They really DO do a very nice fried chicken sandwich here.

The week before a vacation is often a slower time at Caffe Macs; as stocks are allowed to run down, the variety diminishes quietly. While Caffe Macs will be open the first three days of next week, it will be with a reduced menu. I am the lone employee holding down our department those first three days, so I may find myself eating out once or twice.

Today, none of the fancy plate lunches socked me 'twixt the eyes, so I fell back on this. Quite delicious, and I felt most virtuous with that huge mound of vegetation alongside. Note that the huge book makes the small salad look smaller than it actually is:



Fried Chicken Sandwich with Small Salad

[Well...I can't see the chicken or the name of the book. What are you reading now? Though it looks thick enough that we should get another shot of it on Monday and the light will be different. Bon appetit! -SteveB]

[20121116-06](#) 20:48 SteveG "So What the Heck Is That 'Fiscal Cliff' Thing All About, Anyway?"

Sequester, Schmequister. Here are the facts simplified...

"So What the Heck Is That 'Fiscal Cliff' Thing All About, Anyway?" by Linda, MoveOn

Nov. 15, 2012, (<http://front.moveon.org/so-what-the-heck-is-that-fiscal-cliff-thing-all-about-anyway/>)

If you're following the media story, you might believe the GOP's claims that the world's about to end. But it's all a bunch of political posturing so that they can get what their 1% donors want out of the deal.

That's why we have to spread the truth, so our friends and family don't fall for their shenanigans. We've put together a 5-point guide on what this fiscal showdown is really all about.

5-Point Guide To The Fiscal Showdown

1. The "Fiscal Cliff" Is A Myth. As Paul Krugman put it, "The looming prospect of spending cuts and tax increases isn't a fiscal crisis. It is, instead, a political crisis brought on by the G.O.P.'s attempt to take the economy hostage."¹ Republicans are manufacturing this crisis to pressure Democrats to extend the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy and accept painful cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

2. The Bush Tax Cuts Finally End December 31. If Congress does nothing, the ax will fall on all the Bush tax cuts on New Year's Eve.² Then, on January 1, the public pressure on John Boehner and House

Republicans to extend the middle-class tax cuts (already passed by the Senate and waiting to be signed by President Obama) will become irresistible.³ So the middle-class tax cut will eventually get renewed, and we'll have \$823 billion more revenue from the top 2% to do great things with.⁴

3. The Sequester. The sequester is another political creation, forced on Democrats by Republicans in exchange for lifting the debt ceiling last year to avoid crashing our economy.⁵ It's a set of cuts (50% to a bloated military budget and 50% to important domestic programs) designed to make both Republicans and Democrats hate it so much that they'd never let it happen.⁶ And the cuts can be reversed weeks or months into 2013 without causing damage.⁷

4. The Big Three. Nothing happens to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid benefits on January 1—unless Republicans force painful cuts to beneficiaries in exchange for tax increases on the wealthy, which are going to happen anyway if Congress does NOTHING.⁸ So, there's literally no reason benefits cuts should be part of the discussion right now.

5. We Should Be Talking About Jobs. The real crisis Americans want Congress to fix is getting people back to work. And with just a fraction of that \$823 billion from the wealthiest 2%, we could create jobs for more than 20,000 veterans and pay for the 300,000 teachers and 52,000 first responders, which our communities so desperately need.⁹ That's not to mention jobs from investing in clean energy and our national infrastructure.

Please share this with your friends and family—and talk about it at the dinner table next week. The first step to winning this showdown is making sure we're all armed with the facts.

Sources

¹"Hawks and Hypocrites," *The New York Times*, November 11, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=284476>.

²"Bush-Era Tax Cuts," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=284477>.

³"Boehner Is Bluffing," *Slate*, November 9, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=284478>.

⁴"CBO: Ending High-Income Tax Cuts Would Save Almost \$1 Trillion," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, August 24, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=284479>.

⁵"The sequester, explained," *The Washington Post*, September 14, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=284480>.

⁶Ibid.

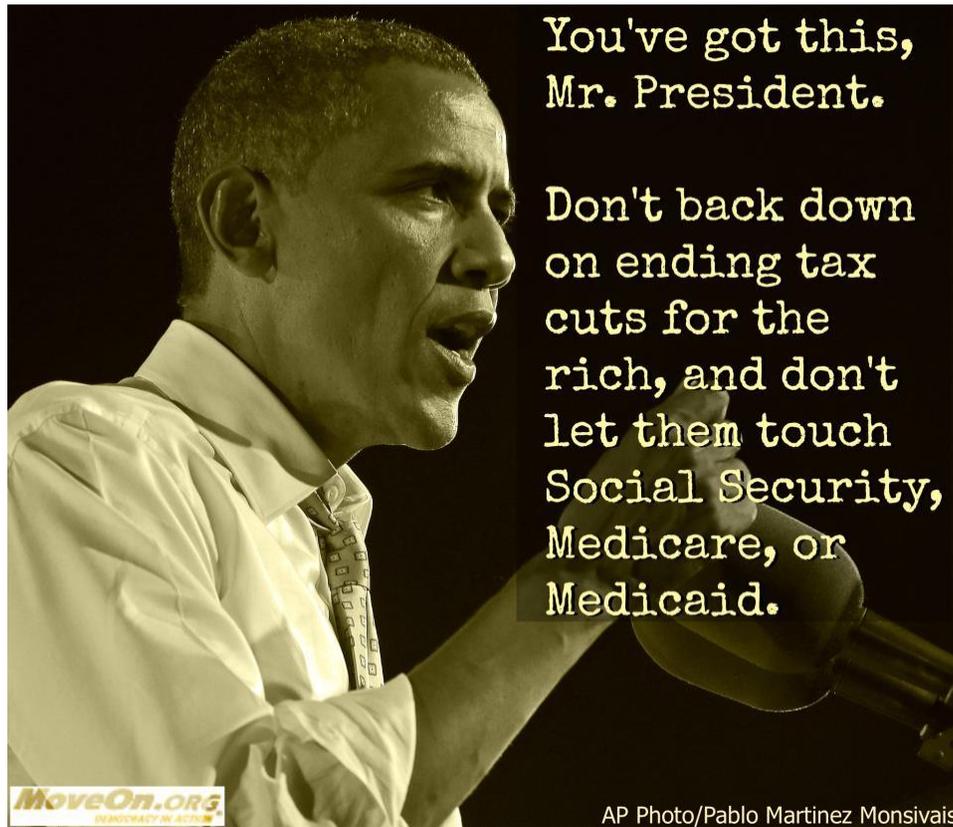
⁷"Let's Not Make a Deal," *The New York Times*, November 8, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=284484>.

⁸"How the Across-the-Board Cuts in the Budget Control Act Will Work," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, April 27, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=284489>.

⁹"Veterans' Jobs Bill Blocked in the Senate," *The New York Times*, September 19, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=284488>.

"Jan Schakowsky Announces new Budget Plan with Focus on Jobs," *The Huffington Post*, August 10, 2011, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=263135>.

"Fact Sheet: The American Jobs Act," *The White House*, September 8, 2011, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=264021>.



[20121117-02](#)

10:55

Art

Re: "So What the Heck Is That 'Fiscal Cliff' Thing All About, Anyway?"
(reply to SteveG, above)

Good summary. I know some want to get excited over what I am not quite sure about the Benghazi attack but that's history, and seems to me there are more pressing items for the future.

[20121117-01](#)

07:45

MarthaH

"No, It's Not Christians' Fault Obama Won"

For the record:

"No, It's Not Christians' Fault Obama Won" by Domenico Montanaro, NBC News

Nov. 16, 2012, (<http://firstread.nbcnews.com/news/2012/11/16/15219396-no-its-not-christians-fault-obama-won?lite>)

The outspoken Rev. Franklin Graham claimed today that the "majority of Christians" did not vote.

"We know that from the statistics that I've heard that the majority of Christians in this country just did not vote for whatever reason," he told the Christian Broadcasting Network's David Brody. "The vast majority of evangelicals did not go to the polls." He added, "God is in control, and if Christians are upset, they need to be upset at themselves. We need to do a better job of getting our people- the church to vote. Now, I'm not trying to tell you how to vote, you can vote, but vote, my goodness, and vote for candidates that stand for Biblical values."

But Graham's assertion -- and implication that had white Christian evangelicals just showed up in bigger numbers, President Obama would have lost -- is off base.

In fact, white evangelicals/born-again Christians made up the same percentage of the electorate as they did in 2008 – 26%. They voted for Mitt Romney, a devout Mormon, by a wider margin than they did for Sen. John McCain four years ago.

And, they made up a larger share of the electorate in 2012 than in 2004, when the Christian Right supposedly fueled George W. Bush's reelection. They also voted for Romney with the exact same margin as for Bush in 2004, 78%-21%.

Not to mention, Obama won the 48 percent of the electorate that was Christian and not Protestant or Mormon -- 50%-48% among Catholics (25% of the electorate) and 50%-49% of "Other Christians" (23% of the electorate). In Ohio, they were 1 point more of the electorate than 2008; in Colorado, 4 points higher; in Iowa, up 7 points; in Nevada, up 2.

White evangelical voters in select swing states:

- CO: 25%, 76-22 Romney; 2008: 21%, 76-23 McCain
- FL: 24%, 79-21 Romney; 2008: 24%, 77-21 McCain
- IA: 38%, 64-35 Romney; 2008: 31%, 65-33 McCain
- NV: 18%, 69-28 Romney; 2008: 16%, 72-27 McCain
- OH: 31%, 69-30 Romney; 2008: 30%, 71-27 McCain

They did decline as a share of the electorate in North Carolina, Virginia, and Wisconsin. But the drops in states like North Carolina (Graham's home state) and Virginia likely have less to do with apathy and more to do with demographic changes – transplants in North Carolina's Research Triangle and growth in the Washington, D.C., suburbs of Northern Virginia, for example.

The fact is, Virginia and North Carolina are looking less and less like the Old South and more and more like Mid-Atlantic states.

White evangelical voters in the South (where exit polls are available):

- MS: 50%, 95-5 Romney; 2008: 46%, 94-6 McCain
- AL: 47% , 90-10 Romney; 2008: 47%, 92-8 McCain
- NC: 35%, 79-20 Romney; 2008: 44%, 74-25 McCain
- VA: 23%, 83-17 Romney; 2008: 28%, 79-20 McCain

Are there Christian evangelicals who did not vote? Certainly. But that's true every year and of every demographic group.

Evangelicals make up 26 percent of adults in the country, according to a major 2008 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life survey. They matched that this election.

The U.S. Census says there are more than 311 million people in the United States. If evangelical adults are 26 percent of them, then there would be 80 million potential voters.

So far, 123 million votes have been counted in this election – and that number will get higher by the millions as votes continue to be counted like in 2008. Evangelicals made up 26 percent of them, therefore, about 32 million evangelicals voted – less than half of their population.

But there's a need for context here: (1) They make up just 14 percent of the registered-voter base in the NBC/Wall Street Journal poll. They outpaced that percentage in the presidential election, (2) This is true of every other demographic group in the country as well.

Latinos, for example, according to the U.S. Census, are nearly 17 percent of the country, but only made up 10 percent of the 2012 electorate. They make up just 8 to 9 percent of the registered-voter base of the NBC/WSJ poll.

That would mean just 12 million of the 52 million adult Hispanics voted.

If this was Australia, and the U.S. had compulsory voting, Graham's argument that evangelicals would have tipped the balance would not hold up very well.

20121118-01 07:50 MarthaH "Low Mississippi River Water Levels May Halt Barges"

Having crossed the Miss..iss..i..ppi on stepping stones at Lake Itasca, MN, (ALL should!) and having seen her further down, this article and our conditions last summer ring many bells.

"Low Mississippi River Water Levels May Halt Barges" by Jim Salter and Jim Suhr, AP/ABC News

Nov. 17, 2012, (<http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/low-mississippi-river-water-levels-halt-barges-17747643#.UKoL5od9Iih>)

(ST. LOUIS) The gentle whirl of passing barges is as much a part of life in St. Louis as the Gateway Arch and the Cardinals, a constant, almost soothing backdrop to a community intricately intertwined with the Mississippi River.

But next month, those barges packing such necessities as coal, farm products and petroleum could instead be parked along the river's banks. The stubborn drought that has gripped the Midwest for much of the year has left the Mighty Mississippi critically low — and it will get even lower if the Army Corps of Engineers presses ahead with plans to reduce the flow from a Missouri River dam.

Mississippi River interests fear the reduced flow will force a halt to barge traffic at the river's midpoint. They warn the economic fallout will be enormous, potentially forcing job cuts, raising fuel costs and pinching the nation's food supply.

"This could be a major, major impact at crisis level," said Debra Colbert, senior vice president of the Waterways Council, a public policy organization representing ports and shipping companies. "It is an economic crisis that is going to ripple across the nation at a time when we're trying to focus on recovery."

At issue is a plan by the corps to significantly reduce the amount of water released from the Gavins Point Dam near Yankton, S.D., a move to conserve water in the upper Missouri River basin also stung by the drought. The outflow, currently at 36,500 cubic feet per second, is expected to be cut to 12,000 cubic feet per second over several days, starting Friday.

The Missouri flows gently into the Mississippi around a bend just north of St. Louis. From there, about 60 percent of the Mississippi River water typically comes from the Missouri. This year, because of the drought, the Mississippi is even more reliant on Missouri River water — 78 percent of the Mississippi River at St. Louis is water that originated from the Missouri.

The Mississippi is so low there now that if it drops another 5 feet, barge traffic may shut down from St. Louis to the confluence of the Ohio River at Cairo, Ill., perhaps as soon as early December. Barges already are required to carry lighter loads.

Major Gen. John Peabody, commander of the Mississippi Valley Division of the corps, said the reduced Missouri River flow will remove 2-3 feet of depth of the Mississippi at St. Louis. To help offset that, he has authorized an emergency release of water from an upper Mississippi River reservoir in Minnesota. But that will add just 3-6 inches of depth at St. Louis.

Corps officials responsible for the Missouri River say they have no choice but to reduce the flow. A congressionally-authorized document known as the Missouri River Master Manual, completed about a decade ago, requires the corps to protect interests of the Missouri River. What happens on the Mississippi as a result is incidental.

"We don't believe we have the authority to operate for the Mississippi River," said Jody Farhat, chief of the Water Management Division for the corps' Northwest Division.

Farhat said the drought is taking a toll on the upper Missouri River basin. Recreation is being hurt because the water is so shallow, she said. Indian artifacts normally under water are being exposed, making them prone to looters. And if the drought persists into next year as expected, hydropower could be impacted.

As a result, she said, water behind the reservoirs must be conserved rather than released.

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon, Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn and U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt of Missouri have all expressed concerns about the plan to cut the flow. An editorial Friday in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch urged Congress to come up with a management plan for the entire ecosystem, not just the Missouri River.

"Until Congress gives a higher priority to the nation's great rivers, and acts as a referee among competing interests, all of us will pay," the editorial read.

The stakes are especially high in St. Louis. The region is home to several barge companies, two of the nation's largest coal companies and countless other businesses that use the Mississippi to move their products both for domestic and international use.

Knight Hawk Coal Co. of the St. Louis-area town of Percy, Ill., uses the river to ship 80 percent of the 4.5 million tons of the black ore it bores out of southern Illinois mines each year. Closure of the river could force the company to consider something it's never done — part with some of its 400 employees.

"If they were to close the river for any significant period, I think we would have to be in a position where we'd have to look at layoffs," said Andrew Carter, a company vice president. "... Level heads need to prevail, and this river needs to stay open."

Commerce on the river always has been subject to nature's whims — ice and floods, in addition to drought, can stop river traffic.

Locks and dams built along the upper Mississippi River starting in the 1930s have helped balance the ups and downs of the waterway. Also, the corps spends months each year dredging the river bottom, adding depth so barges don't scrape. Dredging in the middle-Mississippi began a month early, in July, because of the drought, said Mike Petersen of the corps office in St. Louis.

The corps also plans to use explosives to remove two rock formations on the river bottom in southern Illinois that can impede barges during low-water periods, though that work isn't expected to start until February.

Trade groups for river interests are asking Barack Obama's administration for a presidential declaration that would force the corps to maintain the existing Missouri River flow and expedite removal of the rock formations.

Without a presidential declaration, Farhat said there's little the corps can do given the congressional mandate to work on behalf of the Missouri River basin.

"Basically we have a manual and we're required to follow it," Farhat said. "And there's nothing in that manual that talks about providing support to the Mississippi River."

20121118-03	09:14	SteveB	"Petraeus Scandal Puts Four-Star General Lifestyle under Scrutiny"
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"Petraeus Scandal Puts Four-Star General Lifestyle under Scrutiny" by Rajiv Chandrasekaran and Greg Jaffe, *The Washington Post*

Nov 17, 2012, (http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/petraeus-scandal-puts-four-star-general-lifestyle-under-scrutiny/2012/11/17/33a14f48-3043-11e2-a30e-5ca76eeec857_story.html)



Then-defense secretary Robert M. Gates stopped bagging his leaves when he moved into a small Washington military enclave in 2007. His next-door neighbor was Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time, who had a chef, a personal valet and — not lost on Gates — troops to tend his property.

Gates may have been the civilian leader of the world's largest military, but his position did not come with household staff. So, he often joked, he disposed of his leaves by blowing them onto the chairman's lawn.

"I was often jealous because he had four enlisted people helping him all the time," Gates said in response to a question after a speech Thursday. He wryly complained to his wife that "Mullen's got guys over there who are fixing meals for him, and I'm shoving something into the microwave. And I'm his boss."

Of the many facts that have come to light in the scandal involving former CIA director David H. Petraeus, among the most curious was that during his days as a four-star general, he was once escorted by 28 police motorcycles as he traveled from his Central Command headquarters in Tampa to socialite Jill Kelley's mansion. Although most of his trips did not involve a presidential-size convoy, the scandal has prompted new scrutiny of the imperial trappings that come with a senior general's lifestyle.

The commanders who lead the nation's military services and those who oversee troops around the world enjoy an array of perquisites befitting a billionaire, including executive jets, palatial homes, drivers, security guards and aides to carry their bags, press their uniforms and track their schedules in 10-minute increments. Their food is prepared by gourmet chefs. If they want music with their dinner parties, their staff can summon a string quartet or a choir.

The elite regional commanders who preside over large swaths of the planet don't have to settle for Gulfstream V jets. They each have a C-40, the military equivalent of a Boeing 737, some of which are configured with beds.

Since Petraeus's resignation, many have strained to understand how such a celebrated general could have behaved so badly. Some have speculated that an exhausting decade of war impaired his judgment. Others wondered if Petraeus was never the Boy Scout he appeared to be. But Gates, who still possesses a modest Kansan's bemusement at Washington excess, has floated another theory.

"There is something about a sense of entitlement and of having great power that skews people's judgment," Gates said last week.

Among the Army's general officer corps, however, there is little support for Gates's hypothesis. "I love the man. I am his biggest supporter. But I strongly disagree," said retired Gen. Peter Chiarelli, who served as Gates's senior military assistant. "I find it concerning that he and others are not focusing on the effect on our guys of fighting wars for 11 years. No one was at it longer than Petraeus."

Other veteran commanders concurred with Gates. David Barno, a retired three-star general who commanded U.S. troops in Afghanistan, warned in an interview that the environment in which the top brass lives has the potential "to become corrosive over time upon how they live their life."

"You can become completely disconnected from the way people live in the regular world — and even from the modest lifestyle of others in the military," Barno said. "When that happens, it's not necessarily healthy either for the military or the country."

Although American generals have long enjoyed many perks — in World War II and in Vietnam, some dined on china set atop linen tablecloths — the amenities afforded to today's military leaders are more lavish than anyone else in government enjoys, save for the president.

The benefits have not generated much attention among a public that has long revered its generals as protectors of the nation and moral beacons. And no general has been revered more than Petraeus, a fact that Mullen remarked upon at his retirement ceremony.

He joked that a woman approached him at a dinner party, eyed his medals and asked him if he was somebody important. "I'm the president's top military adviser," he replied.

"Oh my goodness, General Petraeus," the woman said to Mullen. "I'm so sorry. I just didn't recognize you."

Petraeus cultivated his fame by grasping, before most of his comrades, how the narrative of modern warfare is shaped not just on the battlefield but among the chattering class back home. He invited book authors to accompany him, granted frequent interviews to journalists, fostered close relationships with Washington think tanks and embraced political leaders on both sides of the aisle. When President George W. Bush needed a savior for the foundering war in Iraq, he turned to Petraeus, making him the frontman for the troop surge in Baghdad. In the first six months of 2007, Bush mentioned Petraeus's name 150 times in speeches.

Petraeus did not disappoint. Violence dropped in Iraq after he became the top commander there. He returned home as a celebrity. In 2009, he was asked to flip the coin at the Super Bowl.

He became an A-list guest at Washington parties. His stardom, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a collective guilt among civilians disconnected from the conflicts all helped to raise the profile for his fellow generals. It wasn't just Jill Kelley, the Tampa woman who cultivated close relationships with him and other generals, including Gen. John R. Allen, the top commander in Afghanistan, by throwing lavish parties at her million-dollar house. Hostesses around the nation delighted at the presence of commanders in full-dress uniforms at social events.

The adulation fit their lifestyle.

"Being a four-star commander in a combat theater is like being a combination of Bill Gates and Jay-Z — with enormous firepower added," said Thomas E. Ricks, the author of "The Generals," a recently published history of American commanders since World War II.

Many of the gatherings have been genuinely altruistic; community and business leaders have pitched in to help raise money to support wounded troops and military families. But others, it seems, hoped a general or two sprinkled among canape-munching guests would bring elevated social status.

In some cases, the generals, who have spent much of their professional lives in cloistered military bubbles, have not employed the best judgment in cultivating relationships with those who enjoy the sparkle of stars on the shoulder. Allen exchanged hundreds — perhaps even thousands — of e-mails with Kelley over the past four years, a fact

discovered in the FBI investigation into harassing messages sent by Petraeus's former mistress and biographer, Paula Broadwell, to Kelley. The Defense Department is now investigating the messages Allen and Kelley exchanged.

Some retired generals have defended the benefits accorded to their active-duty brethren, noting that many of them work 18-hour days, six to seven days a week. They manage budgets that dwarf those of large multinational companies and are responsible for the lives of thousands of young men and women under their command.

Compared with today's plutocrats, their pay is modest. In 2013, the base salary for a four-star general with at least 38 years of service will be almost \$235,000, although federal personnel regulations limit their take-home pay to \$179,700. Unlike top civilians in government, top generals also receive free housing and subsidies for food and uniforms. And when they retire, those who have served at least 40 years get an annual pension that is slightly more than active-duty base pay — this year it is \$236,650.

Several generals noted that perks, such as planes, cars and staff aides, are constrained by hundreds of pages of rules designed to ensure that they are used only for government business.

But the frantic search for cuts to reduce the growth of government debt could soon put some of the four-star benefits at risk. When he was at the Pentagon, Gates wanted to trim some of the perks but ran into resistance. It was, he said, the "third rail" of the Defense Department.

"You don't need a cadre of people at your beck and call in an age of austerity, unless you are a field commander in Iraq or Afghanistan," a former top aide to Gates said on the condition of anonymity.

The travel practices of two theater commanders, which prompted Pentagon investigations this year, may further jeopardize the perks.

When he was former head of the U.S. Africa Command, Army Gen. William "Kip" Ward spent hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars for private travel, including using military vehicles to shuttle his wife on shopping trips and to a spa, according to a report by the Defense Department's inspector general. The report detailed lengthy stays at lavish hotels for Ward, his wife and his staff members — he billed the government for a refueling stop overnight in Bermuda, where the couple stayed in a \$750 suite — and the use of five-vehicle motorcades when he traveled in Washington. The report also said Ward often took longer-than-necessary business trips to the United States, resulting in "exponential" increases in costs.

The current top U.S. commander in Europe, Adm. James Stavridis, also came under the scrutiny of the inspector general for using a military jet to fly to the Burgundy region of France for a dinner organized by an international society of wine enthusiasts. Stavridis defended the trip as an opportunity to meet with French military and business leaders.

He was cleared of wrongdoing by Navy Secretary Ray Mabus this month. Ward, however, was not so fortunate. Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta announced last week that Ward would be demoted and forced to retire at a three-star rank. He also will have to repay the government \$82,000, but he still will receive a \$208,000-a-year pension.

Peter Feaver, a National Security Council official in the Bush administration, defended the generals' need for perks and large staffs, noting that when they entertain foreign dignitaries they are bound by military standards of pageantry and protocol that don't exist in the State Department.

"The military is trapped in an older cultural time warp," Feaver said.

But he worried that the recent high-profile excesses could chip away at the military's credibility. There's a sentiment among the ranks that generals are out of touch, he said.

"This provides fuel for that kind of critique," he said. "It can do damage to the institution."

"Driving America's 85 MPH Toll Road before the Fun Gets Old" by Neal Pollack, Motoramic/Yahoo News

Nov. 14, 2012, (<http://autos.yahoo.com/blogs/motoramic/driving-texas-130-america-fastest-road-fun-gets-002957225.html>)

I went for a little drive the other day. A new section of Texas Tollway 130 had opened two weeks previous to more national attention than regional road ribbon-cuttings usually get. That's because the speed limit on this new road, which runs from Mustang Ridge, a nothing town southeast of Austin to Seguin, a slightly larger nothing town southeast of San Antonio, was to be 85 mph, the highest in North America. The other half of the road, heading north from Mustang Ride up to Waco, already has a speed limit of 80, but that wasn't enough. South Central Texas needed a drag strip, and I needed to run it, especially because after Nov. 11, it would no longer be free.

I wanted my first time to be special. The cars showing up in my driveway didn't suit: The Kia Soul, while peppy enough at 60 mph, threatened to blow apart as you neared 90, and that Mitsubishi crossover was about as fun as a can of Chunky soup. My daily drive, the 2010 Toyota Prius, could have handled the challenge — after all, Al Gore's son once got pulled over in Malibu doing 100-plus in an older model — but that still didn't make it the ideal choice. NASA once popped a monkey into space, too. I wanted a rocket built for humans.

Then it appeared in all its big-shouldered, "Radiant Silver Metallic" glory, a 2013 Cadillac ATS, with a 3.6 liter, 321-hp V-6 engine, barely more than 1,000 miles on the odometer, and "light platinum" leather seats emitting enough off-gassing to kill a canary. This was an American-made sports sedan, built for speed. The next morning, I waited until rush hour ended, strapped myself in, and launched.

Because I knew what was coming, the 20-plus miles on US 183 south to get to Mustang Ridge seemed pedestrian, even with its speed limit of 70 mph. I tapped the gas, not too heavily, just to see how quickly the ATS got to 85. It got there very quickly indeed, but I couldn't stay legally, so I backed off and waited. As the signs for the TX 130 turnoff began to appear, my palms dampened and my stomach fluttered. I felt like Chuck Yeager in *The Right Stuff*, even though I wasn't anywhere close. I know Germans who drive this fast every day before breakfast.

It grew closer: a mile and a half, a half mile, a quarter mile. I eased into the left lane, put on the turn signal, jacked the transmission into six-speed paddle shift mode, and hit the on ramp going forty. And then I was on the magic highway, doing 65, 70, 75, 80. When I saw the first sign that read "Speed Limit 85," I gave the pedal that little extra nudge and broke into the blue.

The ATS purred gratefully and smoothly, glad to be meeting the challenge for which it was engineered. It felt glorious to be going that fast, without fear of punishment. Naturally, I tested the limits. Wouldn't you? I went 90. And then I went 95. After that, 97 seemed natural. And so did driving 100. Even 110 wasn't out of the question, but when I reached that, I thought about the ticket I'd get if I got caught, not to mention the near-certain death I'd face if I crashed, so I eased back to a leisurely, and almost-legal, 88 mph.

South Central Texas will soon be one long urban megalopolis to rival southern California

But I wasn't going to get caught speeding, or at least probably not, because the road was almost empty, save the occasional truck or boxy, lonely Honda Element shuttling from one nowhere Texas town to another. The road opened before me, brand-new, briefly toll-free, and beautiful, sloping gently up and down, inviting with fresh temptations. Drive me as fast as you want, it seemed to say. I don't mind.

As the exits blurred past, I had plenty of time and space to take in my surroundings. The highway was so new that it contained not one single commercial building. A few mowing crews popped up here and there, and I saw a couple of guys landscaping slope. Other than that, there was nothing to see but trees and fields and open sky. It felt like what highway driving had been meant to be all along, before it became a passionless, endless battle with snack-chip trucks and bloated outlet mall patrons. I hadn't seen a billboard in more than 20 minutes. This was freedom.

I ran that highway in less than half an hour, got off at Seguin, bought a 20-ounce Cherry Coke Zero, and turned around. On the return trip, the 130 showed signs of a dark future. First of all, it was lunchtime, and therefore more crowded. It's one thing to drive 85 and higher when you're the only car on the road, but quite another when you're competing with other drivers who understand lane discipline about as well as they do theoretical physics.

This strip, I realized, would soon lose its innocence. The state of Texas didn't build it as a go-cart track for gas-hogging Caddys. Austin and San Antonio are both booming, and the I-35 corridor connecting them shudders under the weight of extreme population growth. They built the 130 to ease the traffic pressure. It probably will, a bit, but it's also an open invitation to developers. That's some pretty country right there along the San Marcos River. The day is coming when South Central Texas will be one long urban megalopolis to rival southern California. At one end sits a sign that points visitors to the new Circuit Of the Americas race track, and at the other, the entrance to Interstate 10. TX 130, the fastest road in the U.S.A., heralds a kind of lost innocence.

It's also, despite what the quasi-libertarian speed hogs who run this state claim, kind of a death trap. At one point, when I stopped to take pictures along the shoulder, a Corolla full of college kids raced past going way above the substantial speed limit, switching lanes constantly and for no reason, looking like a bee in flight. Some Austin troubadour with better songwriting skills than me is going to write a tribute to living fast and dying young on this road.

There've already been quite a few accidents, four on opening night, in fact, including one car completely totaled. That's because Texas built the 130 in prime feral hog territory. This forced them to put up large digital signs, at 10-mile intervals, reading "WILDLIFE CROSSING." That's all fine and good, but the problem is that wildlife can't read. Just outside Lockhart, I had to swerve fast and violently to avoid a freshly eviscerated coyote carcass. This is going to be a disgusting massacre without end.

How deeply ironic, then, that I pulled off TX 130 on my way home to take a five-minute jog into Lockhart, the barbecue capital of America, and bought a two-pound slab of pork ribs at Smitty's to bring home. What was once a half-day family trip has suddenly become an errand far less time-consuming than a visit to IKEA.

After unhitching the magnificent ATS from its oat bag in the parking lot, I got back in to finish the job on TX 130, the car smelling like deliciously un-feral pork. At the end of the road, a McDonald's loomed, signaling the end of this too-brief visit to Autopia. I transitioned back onto the 183, still going at least 80, and had to brake too suddenly when I barely noticed a low-lying bank of stoplights.

It was time to drive in the slow lane for a while.



<http://writing.upenn.edu/projects/mississippi.php>



—Friends of the Middle,
Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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