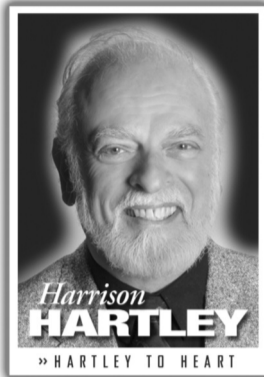


# Michael Who?

Somebody who actually didn't know who Michael Jackson was would be immediately classified by many Americans as bizarre, mentally defective, or perverse. Why?

Nobody – least of all me – wants to make light of a death, no matter who's death it was, but that's the point. For days now the unfortunate passing of that unfortunate person has absolutely eaten the news cycle whole. Again, why? Though talented, Michael Jackson was himself bizarre, at least a little mentally defective, and possibly even slightly perverse. His life is a mosaic of commercial artistic successes interspersed with episodes of misery and, if reports are correct, he died seriously in debt when he should have been one of the wealthiest people on the planet. He may have had a "feel" (pun intended) for interesting gyration accompanied by counter-tenor warbling that appealed to great numbers of people and caused them to "send money," but in what sense is this worthy of days and days of microscopic public examination?



There's a wholesale revolution going on in Iran; people are dying in the streets; the rest of the world is watching with bated breath, and what do we get here? Autopsy reports by the hour on Michael Jackson.

The governor of a state disappeared for five days without telling his staff, his family, or anybody else where he could be found in case of an emergency; he returned, admitted an affair with a lady in Argentina, and... and what? Michael Jackson dies and all of a sudden what ought to be of interest to all Americans regardless of political affiliation and

NOT as a matter of empty-headed gossip but because we really do need to know where our governing executives are at all times and that they can be trusted to do their duty as a matter of public interest, all this really important news (Will he resign? Be impeached? What will other Republicans have to say? Will his state take action beyond impeachment?) goes underground and anyone interested has to dig into the depths of the internet PAST the endless funeral laments for Michael

Jackson to find out what's up. Why?

And has no one died besides Michael Jackson? Farrah Fawcett, of course, who almost managed to consume the news cycle herself; mainly, I think, because she was pretty, sympathetic, and had such a tough death from cancer. There is a sense in which her passing is more worthy of lengthy consideration than Jackson's exactly because it was protracted and, by all accounts, she fought through it bravely, but MJ upstages her.

Then, of course, the fellow with the heavy black beard (I can't even think of his name) who became famous for selling things on television and never getting his voice below ten decibels – roughly the volume of a jet engine – died unexpectedly. He was about Michael Jackson's age. I imagine his passing is just as tragic for his family as Jackson's or anybody else's would be for all their respective families. There's something not quite right about making so much of one and hardly mentioning the others.

Ed McMahon died, too, during the same short period, and got about the same coverage as the vociferous pitch-man. Famous primarily as Johnny Carson's sidekick, McMahon had something going for

him besides celebrity, however, and it's hardly been mentioned. Ed McMahon was a genuine war hero. Of all the celebrities who died in the last week of June 2009, he alone has done service that deserves extended comment. He was a WWII Marine combat fighter pilot earning six medals, he was a Marine trainer and test pilot afterward, and he returned to active duty to fly in Korea. He retired from the Marine Reserves with a rank of Colonel and was later commissioned Brigadier General in the California Air National Guard. That deserves comment and examination because it goes beyond mere celebrity.

The thing about too many Americans is that apparently they can't go beyond mere celebrity. Is it because they live in a comic-book world and reality is too much trouble for them? It's a puzzle, and it's a problem. In the meantime, however, it is too bad about Michael Jackson, who, celebrity aside, hardly seems to have lead a happy life. I think the best we can do for that poor fellow is take a slightly altered leaf from Shakespeare's book, so: "The singing that men do lives after them; their errors should be interred with their bones." RIP, Michael Jackson; and now, please, what's the news?

# Celebrating Freedom, Happy 4th!

There was a time when I enjoyed setting off fireworks. Normally that consisted of a few firecrackers and bottle rockets a day or two before the Fourth.

As a kid (back in the last century) family would gather and we would enjoy good food and set off fireworks after we ate .

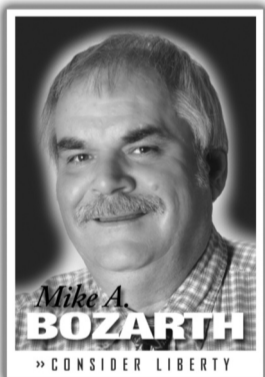
Even today, I still gather with friends and family come Independence Day. I now prefer to watch rather than shoot off fireworks.

The food and companionship of those I care about are more important to me than even watching the fireworks.

But Our Independence is absolutely worth celebrating. But perhaps more important than declaring America's independence were the principles our country was founded on.

Our forefathers set up a democratic system--a Constitutional Republic. It put the ultimate power into the hands of the people instead of the privileged.

A country governed by the Constitution and law. They gave us a division of federal power with the



executive, legislative and judicial branches to help insure one branch did not become so powerful it would govern without the others.

A country so intent on protecting the people's freedom, the Constitution could not be ratified without adding the Bill of Rights.

It is those Bill of Rights--protections our government gave its people--that

is probably the biggest defining part of my political philosophy.

The freedom of the press is what allows newspapers like this an opportunity to report and comment on the news. The news media shines the light of day even on the most shadowy of activities. From uncovering Watergate to covering Gov. Sanford's indiscretions.

From freedom of speech and the right to keep and bear arms to the 10th Amendment--putting ultimate power in the hands of the states and the people--the Bill of Rights empower the people of this country.

An argument can be made that we have seen the Bill of Rights tampered with. Perhaps none more than the 10th Amendment by taking more power from the states and imposing more laws and rules at the federal level.

Yet in spite of all its flaws, this country remains arguably the most free and one of the most liveable in the world today.

There are countries that excel in some areas over ours.

Japan probably surpasses us in education and work ethic.

The United States has a free-market economy, but perhaps not as pure as Costa Rica.

We have taken great strides in diversity and tolerance, but we still have a ways to go before we catch The Netherlands.

Our country has its election problems, yet I don't think we've ever seen widespread election fraud as we likely just witnessed in Iran.

9-11 is still remembered and talked about, but thankfully we have not had to deal with terrorism as they do even today in Iraq.

We complain about taxes, but most of Europe has it worse.

All in all, I think we have hundreds, if not thousands of reasons to celebrate.

Happy Fourth, and let us remember why it is possible.



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