

May Your Conversations Be Most Profound

Commentary by Peter Perry

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The year was 1855 when John Bartlett published the “*First Edition of Familiar Quotations.*” It was a small thin volume of just 258 pages set in a single column with an index which ran a full 36-pages. His purpose was to record the obligations our language owes to the various authors for their contributions of numerous phrases and quotations which have become household words. The publication contained a collection of passages, phrases and proverbs traced to their sources in ancient and modern literature. The first nine editions were under the editorship of Bartlett, and the Ninth, published in 1891 had grown to 1158 pages. This volume contained 862 pages of text and 296 pages of index. At that time Bartlett commented that it was the close of the volume’s tentative life, a prophesy which was upset in 1914 with the publication of the tenth edition. I am fortunate to have a copy of the red-leather bound “*Centennial Edition*” the 14th edition which was published in 1955, a gift to my deceased father-in-law which was handed down to me upon his passing. This edition had grown substantially to 1613 pages. It contained a small note from a friend which read, “*May your conversations be most profound.*” Now sixty years later, I have no idea of subsequent editions published or as to the number of pages. But one can only imagine the wonderful quotes from contemporaries that they now would contain from our storied and more recent past. There have been several other more recent publications such as *The Great Quotations* (George Seldes) and *Quotationary* (Leonard Roy Frank) which include wonderful nuggets of wisdom from contemporary writers, public figures and others.

For me these books represent a treasure chest of written and spoken words of ideas, courage and conviction. From browsing these books, one can gain a vivid sense of what the conflict of ideas has meant in man’s history. They represent a rear window which allows me to peer back through to witness man’s best thinking. For me these quotations illuminate human thought, but more importantly, enable me to travel down a path of discovery for the creation of new ideas and thought.

Benjamin Franklin was one of our wisest Americans. He happens to be one of my favorite historical characters and his wisdom can be discovered in many of these publications. I hesitate to call him a politician since that word now connotes a different meaning. He was a scientist, diplomat, writer, printer and of course a great statesman. I recently discovered one of his quotes which I thought might be appropriate as we bear witness to the state of affairs in today’s news rooms across America.

“Without freedom of thought there can be no such thing as wisdom, and no such thing as public liberty, without freedom of speech; which is the right of every man, as far as by it he does not hurt and control the right of another; and this is the only check it ought to suffer, and the only bounds it ought to know.”

This was published in *The Dogwood Papers*, in 1722 when Franklin was only 16. Later on, in 1776 Franklin was a member of The Continental Congress and was one of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence. He was 70 years old at the time and the oldest signer. Although Jefferson was the author of the first draft, Franklin was one of the five known as “Committee of Five” who had been appointed by the Congress to work on the Declaration. Franklin’s understandings and beliefs regarding liberty and freedom obviously had been born early in his life and his convictions remained steadfast throughout all his years.

Freedom of speech is supposedly guaranteed in the First Amendment of our Constitution but today it is undergoing significant scrutiny. We now are subject to a new standard which to some extent interferes with our freedom of speech. Everything we say, every word we utter is now subject to something we call “*Political Correctness*.” We now have certain words that we must eliminate from our vocabulary and strike from the English Dictionary. I have come to the conclusion that we are living in crazy times. Everyone has a camera on their iPhone and every word said is recorded and instantly published through social media and subject to another’s scrutiny almost immediately. It is not just the spoken or written word, but our thoughts and preferences that are under attack and could soon be hijacked.

Speaking of hijacking, we are witnessing rioting and lawlessness in many American cities with statues being ripped from their bases and many anarchist attempting to rewrite history on the basis of social justice, throwing rocks and bottles, breaking store fronts, looting, clubbing people, shooting children and policemen with face masks to hide their identity. History represents truths learned from actual past events and we cannot erase these truths. Many have died for our flag and those lives lost were for those rights beyond the first amendment. So, we have a choice to make which will decide on the future for mankind. Getting back to the Dogwood Papers and Franklin...”***As far and by it he does not hurt and control the right of another.***” So, are these riots not hurting cities, people and those businesses that are being destroyed.

I would be remiss if I did not quote The First amendment of our Constitution...

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

I cannot resist to highlight the three words that provide some qualification to the First Amendment and I cannot be alone as I bear witness to the truths and reality to the rioting now taking hold in our once great cities...that they certainly do not represent a “***peaceable assembly***.”

Freedom of speech is the bedrock underlying principle of the First amendment. Speech is the expression of one’s thoughts and ideas. To me it does not make any sense that the government should prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea to be offensive or disagreeable to another. We must have the right to speak what we believe to be the truth regardless as to whether it is considered politically correct or not. At the same time, another has the right to disagree. I suppose it all depends on one’s position on the matter before them. How does one judge the measure or degree of an offensive utterance fairly when it is measured in a subjective manner by another?

I found another quote which perhaps best expresses my sentiments with regard to the subject. It was found in a letter written by Thomas Jefferson in 1814. ***“For God’s Sake, let us freely hear both sides.”***

I have received several favorable comments from my readers and have often been asked how I come to write about a particular subject. I can only say that my subject matter finds me. My goal is simply to gain a better understanding of human nature and the world around us. My understanding comes from history and my literary interpretations from the experiences of those past authors. I am thankful for their insightfulness and a forum that allows me to communicate my expressions.

Don’t you just love history and the wonderful utterances of the great authors, statesmen and scribes from the past? I know that I do...and I thank Bartlett and my father-in law every time I pick up that red-leather bound book.

I have recently finished my novel, ***“The Union”*** an authoritative crime story and inside look of the corruption in organized labor and politics. It contains some interesting and informative nuggets of historical events that the reader will enjoy. Look for a release date later this year. which has some interesting back stories of notable events in our history and some geography layered within the main story line of corruption and the secret schemes that move millions into the pockets of corrupt politicians and the Mafia.

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Peter Perry

Perry is a Commercial Real-Estate Broker serving the South Carolina and South Florida markets. He is an independent journalist and author and writes a business column with topics of special interests for regional publications. Articles of interest may be found on WWW.HugoDogood.org. Peter is a native of Upstate New York and was the founder and CEO of a leading healthcare technology company that contracted with government agencies and several notable Fortune 1000 companies and union trust funds across the US. Prior to founding his own company, he was employed by the IBM Company in Sales and Marketing positions. He has over 25 years of hands-on commercial real estate experience as developer, owner and manager of professional office and warehouse properties. He possesses in-depth experience in development, marketing, financing and project management for large, complex projects and is highly proficient in the delivery of commercial real estate services. He has over 40 years of business management, consulting and marketing experience. He can be reached at Peter.perry@Sperrycga.com. Your comments are always invited.