

July 2008

Thanking Milton Friedman

Have you thanked Milton Friedman lately? That's the question PBS asked audiences two years ago, while promoting its retrospective on the life of this hero of freedom. It's a question we should keep asking. Friedman may have passed away in November of 2006, but our debt to him has not.

To help us all remember what Friedman has given us, The James Madison Institute is leading the celebration of Milton Friedman Day in Florida on July 31, Friedman's birthday. Along with other organizations sponsoring events across the country, we want to keep Friedman's legacy alive.

Friedman is honored around the world as one of the greatest champions of freedom in our time. Just think about how things looked for the cause of freedom when Friedman started writing in the 1950s. Communist tyranny dominated half the world, and was aggressively moving to take over the other half. It was an open question whether freedom would survive at all.

But what was probably even worse was that the "free world" itself had lost its faith in freedom. Government management of the whole economy was thought to be clearly more efficient than the chaos of the free market. Since the communists had the advantage – the advantage! – of centralized economic

planning, our only hope to beat them was to centralize our own economy as much as we could and hope it was enough to keep up.

We had lost sight of our founding idea: government that exists to protect the liberty of the individual, and a society that draws strength from that liberty.

Friedman worked long and hard for over half a century to restore that idea. His brilliant mind, his generosity with his time and talents, and his knack for cutting through the fog and explaining ideas clearly brought him success after success.

We have a lot to be thankful for. Friedman's ideas helped win the great 20th century struggle against tyranny. And they extended the blessings of economic prosperity to millions who were being impoverished by inflationary monetary policies and state control of the economy. In the quarter century since Ronald Reagan put Friedman's ideas (and his students) in charge of the money supply, all sectors of American society from top to bottom have enjoyed an unprecedented explosion of new wealth.

Friedman worked to extend freedom in a variety of other areas, too. His influence was crucial in ending the peacetime draft, which is one important reason our military is now the most powerful fighting force the world has ever seen. If you force people to do things,

Friedman explained, they don't do them nearly as well as if you get them to do things voluntarily.

In his last decade, Friedman concentrated on educational freedom. School choice, which lets parents choose the right education for their children instead of handing them over to a government bureaucracy, was his last great crusade.

He and his wife Rose founded the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation in 1996 to promote school choice for all students. Currently, there are 23 school choice programs in operation throughout the nation, serving 190,000 students in 14 states plus the District of Columbia.

As host of a luncheon in Tallahassee for select high school seniors who will be enrolled in an economics course this fall, The James Madison Institute will

celebrate Milton Friedman and pass on, to the next generation, knowledge about the man who carried out the intellectual battle that has allowed us all to enjoy the opportunities, choices, and personal responsibility that freedom brings.

So, have you thanked Milton Friedman lately? If you love liberty, join us on July 31 in thanking the man who did so much to preserve, protect, and defend it.

As a 501(c)(3) organization, The James Madison Institute does not support, endorse, or oppose candidates or proposed legislation. For more information, visit <http://www.jamesmadison.org> or contact Tanja Clendinen (850) 383-4633 tanja@jamesmadison.org