



Thomas Sowell: A Beacon of Reason in a Nonsensical World

25 quotes from one of America's most prolific intellectuals.

When I hear the name Thomas Sowell, it gets my immediate attention. Dr. Sowell, recently retired from his position as Senior Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, is an American economist turned social theorist, political philosopher, and best-selling author.

Born in North Carolina in 1930, Sowell grew up in Harlem, New York. He dropped out of high school at age 17 due to financial difficulties and problems at home, but went on to serve in the United States Marine Corps during the Korean War. Following the war, he received a bachelor's degree from Harvard, graduating Magna Cum Laude in 1958. The following year, he received a master's degree from Columbia University. In 1968, he earned a Doctorate in Economics from the University of Chicago.

Sowell served on the faculties of Cornell University and University of California, Los Angeles, and also worked for think tanks such as the Urban Institute. He has written more than 30 books and is a National Humanities Medal recipient for innovative scholarship which incorporated history, economics and political science.

What I appreciate most about Mr. Sowell is his unique perspective as an African-American conservative with libertarian leanings who came of age during the Jim Crow era.

The best way to experience Sowell is to view a sampling of his many famous quotes and dialogues. Here are 25 quotes to make you think.



Education

1. "Too much of what is called 'education' is little more than an expensive isolation from reality."

Health Services

2. "It is amazing that people who think we cannot afford to pay for doctors, hospitals, and medications somehow think that we can afford to pay for doctors, hospitals, medications and a government bureaucracy."

On Government & Politicians

3. "The real minimum wage is zero."
4. "The most basic question is not what is best, but who shall decide what is best?"
5. "Socialism in general has a record of failure so blatant that only an intellectual could ignore or evade it."

6. “The big divide in this country is not between Democrats and Republicans, or women and men, but between talkers and doers.”
7. “Capitalism knows only one color: that color is green; all else is necessarily subservient to it, hence, race, gender and ethnicity cannot be considered within it.”
8. “If you have been voting for politicians who promise to give you goodies at someone else’s expense, then you have no right to complain when they take your money and give it to someone else.”
9. “The first lesson of economics is scarcity: There is never enough of anything to satisfy all those who want it. The first lesson of politics is to disregard the first lesson of economics.”
10. “Balanced budget requirements seem more likely to produce accounting ingenuity than a genuinely balanced budget.”
11. “It is hard to imagine a more stupid or more dangerous way of making decisions than by putting those decisions in the hands of people who pay no price for being wrong.”
12. “Whenever a problem is proclaimed in the media there will almost invariably be a solution proposed in politics. Often the solution is worse than the problem.”
13. “You will never understand bureaucracies until you understand that for bureaucrats procedure is everything and outcomes are nothing.”

On the Workplace

14. “People who enjoy meetings should not be in charge of anything.”
15. “Talkers are usually more articulate than doers, since talk is their specialty.”
16. “The least productive people are usually the ones who are most in favor of holding meetings.”

On Taxes and Entitlements

17. “The assumption that spending more of taxpayer’s money will make things better has survived all kinds of evidence that it has made things worse.”
18. “Despite a voluminous and often fervent literature on income distribution, the cold fact is that income is not distributed: It is earned.”
19. “One of the consequences of such notions as entitlements is that people who have contributed nothing to society feel that society owes them something.”
20. “One of the sad signs of out times is that we have demonized those who produce, subsidized those who refuse to produce, and canonize those who complain.”
21. “The welfare state is not really about the welfare of the masses. It’s about the egos of the elites.”

On Race, Diversity, Multiculturalism

22. “Racism is not dead, but is on life support—kept alive by politicians, race hustlers and people who get a sense of superiority by denouncing others as ‘racists.’”
23. “The next time some academics tell you how important diversity is, ask how many Republicans there are in the sociology department.”
24. “What multiculturalism boils down to is that you can praise any culture in the world except Western culture—and you cannot blame any culture in the world except Western culture.”

In Conclusion

For those who are in lockstep with a particular political narrative on how they feel the world should be, I leave you with this Thomas Sowell pearl of wisdom:

25. “Mistakes can be corrected by those who pay attention to facts but dogmatism will not be corrected by those who are wedded to a vision.”