

"A Truly Great American Died This Week"

James S. Henry

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A truly great American died this week. He was **Ray Charles**, aged 73. Throughout his life, his unique blend of popular, sacred, and soul music transcended the social apartheid of color, class, age, religion, sex, and politics to bring incredible moments of joy, laughter, and delight to hundreds of millions of people all over the world. He was an authentic musical genius, with ability to create amazing new songs in a style all his own – like "I've Got a Woman," "What I'd Say," and "A Fool for You," to name a few. But he could also take another writer's songs of almost any genre and improve them simply by deciding to perform them himself - like "I Can't Stop Loving You," "Georgia on My Mind," and "I'll Be Good to You."

Like **Ellington, Basie, Armstrong, and Miles Davis**, Ray's first and last love was his art. From age 3 right up to the end, he continued to perform and tour even when his body, racked by a plethora of ailments, wanted to quit. Without any apparent effort, he was an authentic optimist, an embodiment of hope and courage for all young people who begin life with seemingly insurmountable difficulties. He was not just a hero to Americans, but was revered in many other countries where jazz is popular, from Russia and France to Japan and Brazil.

From one standpoint Ray was "blind." But he taught us the difference between being able to look and being able to see. **Ray was the real thing.** On this national day of mourning, we truly mourn his loss.

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