

# What's In a Number?

✘ For those old enough to remember comedian, Jack Benny, he insisted on remaining 39 years old on stage despite his actual age. Some women today still coyly respond “39” when asked their age.

Well, they probably wouldn't if they lived in Afghanistan. The number 39 is a big no-no in Afghan society. According to a recent article in the WSJ, “the curse of 39, which swirled through Kabul over the past year, is the latest myth in a largely illiterate country steeped in rumor, superstition and urban legend.”

Thirty-nine has become a byword for prostitution and if your car's license plates end in that number, you're probably not going to be able to sell it to anyone. If your cell phone number contains 39, most people block the number so others can't see it. One shopkeeper turning 39 is bracing himself to face a year of mocking, insults and off-color banter.

This all sounds pretty silly but we, here, in America also have our superstitions. The number thirteen is often considered bad luck and, according to Otis Elevators, 75% of American buildings do not have a 13<sup>th</sup> floor.

Whether you're visiting China where many buildings don't have a 4<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup>, etc. floors because “four” sounds very much like “death” in Mandarin, or Afghanistan where you don't want to utter the number 39, or you stay indoors on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, it's all up to you. But when it comes to numbers, there are real reasons – not just mere superstition – to be concerned.

At this time in America, I think one frightening number is 47. According to a recent Gallup poll, forty-seven percent of Americans believe the government should “redistribute wealth” in the U.S. by enacting heavy taxes on the “rich.” (I

discussed rich vs. poor in "Who's Rich? Who's Poor?")

If at all possible, an even scarier number is 51 which represents the percentage of Americans who pay no federal income tax because either their incomes are too low, or they qualify for enough credits (another word for "welfare"), deductions and exemptions to eliminate their liability.

The number 9 has to be very unlucky for millions of people in the U.S. That's because our unemployment rate has been at or over 9% the last two years despite our administration's promises that the massive spending in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 was going to improve our economy. How's that worked out for you?

Finally, if you really want to be frightened by a number, and not because of some superstition, check out the National Debt Clock which shows, not just a static number, but our national debt in real time which continues to rise by the second. I'm not going to bother to include the entire 14 trillion number because by the time you read this, the number will have changed. This goes way beyond scary.

Right now, I like the number 11612; actually it's 11-6-12, election day 2012. I prefer to be optimistic and hope for major changes in Washington, D.C. come November 6, 2012. We'll see what happens.

Do you have a lucky number?