

Bob Herbert's vision

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

April 8, 2011

I'm late to this, but I can't let it pass by: I'm really going to miss Bob Herbert's op-eds in the *New York Times*. I think E.J. Dionne edges him out as my favorite big-paper columnist; I appreciate Dionne's faith-based angle and elegant prose. Herbert's writing is more workmanlike--some would say formulaic. (If you haven't played Automatic Bob Herbert, [you should](#).)

Still, Herbert stands out for his sustained attention to actual struggling Americans, not just Washington abstractions of them. In a job that can tempt an opinion writer to phone it in, he dug deep for column ideas and sources.

Most importantly, Herbert's writing sparkles with moral clarity. Here's an excerpt from his [final column](#):

Arthur Miller, echoing the poet Archibald MacLeish, liked to say that the essence of America was its promises. That was a long time ago. Limitless greed, unrestrained corporate power and a ferocious addiction to foreign oil have led us to an era of perpetual war and economic decline. Young people today are staring at a future in which they will be less well off than their elders, a reversal of fortune that should send a shudder through everyone.

The U.S. has not just misplaced its priorities. When the most powerful country ever to inhabit the earth finds it so easy to plunge into the horror of warfare but almost impossible to find adequate work for its people or to properly educate its young, it has lost its way entirely.

In a political climate in which the Democrats' message struggles to rise above "like the other guys, but somewhat less insane," Herbert's clarity and passion are sorely needed. He [intends](#) to spend his time "writing more expansively and more aggressively about the injustices visited on working people, the poor and the many others in our society who find themselves on the wrong side of power." I'll be paying attention.