

Century Marks

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Ticking time bombs: The vanquished of war, says war correspondent Chris Hedges, rarely speak about the horrors at the time. That comes much later, particularly when they look back on the suffering they endured as children, and on what it was like to see a mother or father taken away or a community destroyed. Those who execute wars, Hedges observes, also carry scars. Many of the American soldiers in Iraq, he says, “will never sleep well for the rest of their lives. Most will harbor within themselves corrosive feelings of self-loathing and regret.” They’ve also learned the hard truth that our country is not the righteous nation portrayed in our civil religion. “This is why so many combat veterans hate military shrinks and chaplains, whose task is largely to patch them up with the old clichés and ship them back to the battlefield” (*New York Review of Books*, December 16).

Passing the peace: Gena Caponi Tabery, a former professor of American studies, is a church musician who performs in two Episcopal services each Sunday and therefore gets to exchange the peace twice with Christians who span the political spectrum. She confesses that as a Texan she’s voted four times against George W. Bush, yet Karl Rove, Bush’s campaign and political adviser, belonged to her church before he left for Washington, D.C. “We [Christians] don’t all believe the same things,” she concludes, “but we belong to a community whose members have agreed to try to love each other. Much of the time, we succeed” (*Christian Science Monitor*, December 13).

What were the others thinking? Only 60 percent of eligible voters went to the polls in November, 31 percent of them voting for President Bush and 28 percent for John Kerry. Howard Zinn makes the arguable point that the other 40 percent were saying there was no candidate worthy of their vote. He claims the real wishes of the majority weren’t expressed in this election, since more than half the people said they are opposed to the Iraq war, and neither major candidate represented their sentiments (*Progressive*, December 2).

Liberalism a bad word: The meaning of liberalism has shifted from an emphasis on economic and personal liberty in the 19th century to a concern for equality and an advocacy of the welfare state in the 20th; the former promoted less government, the latter more. According to John Lukacs, governmental intervention in social affairs has turned many Americans against government and toward conservatism. The demise of liberalism is, in fact, partially due to its own success: there is far less institutional injustice than there once was. Liberalism, argues Lukacs, is fundamentally about the dignity of human beings (*Chronicle Review*, December 10).

Back to the future: The early Christians, argues Barbara Ehrenreich, modeled a steadfast and heroic morality; as a minority, they ultimately undermined the greatest empire of the world. In the current political environment in America, she believes “liberals and progressives will need to emulate these original Christians, who stood against imperial Rome with their bodies, their hearts and their souls” (*Nation*, November 29).

Kids never had it so bad: Children today lack what the young of earlier times took for granted—freedom. They were free to while away their time or ride their bikes all over town, claims Michael Dirda. “But now, in our test-driven, increasingly regimented educational system, we forthrightly aim to leave no child behind, which means that we leave no child alone.” All children are pressured to excel. In the past, parents might exploit their children for cheap labor or even ignore them. But “today we are their chauffeurs and social secretaries. Little wonder that teenagers complain they are bored, with nothing to do. But when have they done anything for themselves?” (*Washington Post Book World*, December 12-18).

Football and alcohol don’t mix: The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reports that about 1,400 college students die each year from excessive drinking. Because the campus culture of binge drinking is frequently tied to fraternities and athletics, some universities are banning alcohol at both fraternities and football games. But the largest liquor store in Boulder, Colorado, is owned by the University of Colorado’s athletic director (*New York Review of Books*, December 16).

Not a malfunction: The Souper Bowl of Caring is a grassroots ecumenical movement that started in a single church, and has generated over \$24 million to help the hungry and hurting around the world. The idea is that on Super Bowl Sunday (February 6) youth groups hold soup pots by church doors and ask for \$1 contributions. All the money goes directly to the charity of each youth group’s

choice. The youth are also encouraged to volunteer for the charities of their choice. For more information, see www.souperbowl.org.