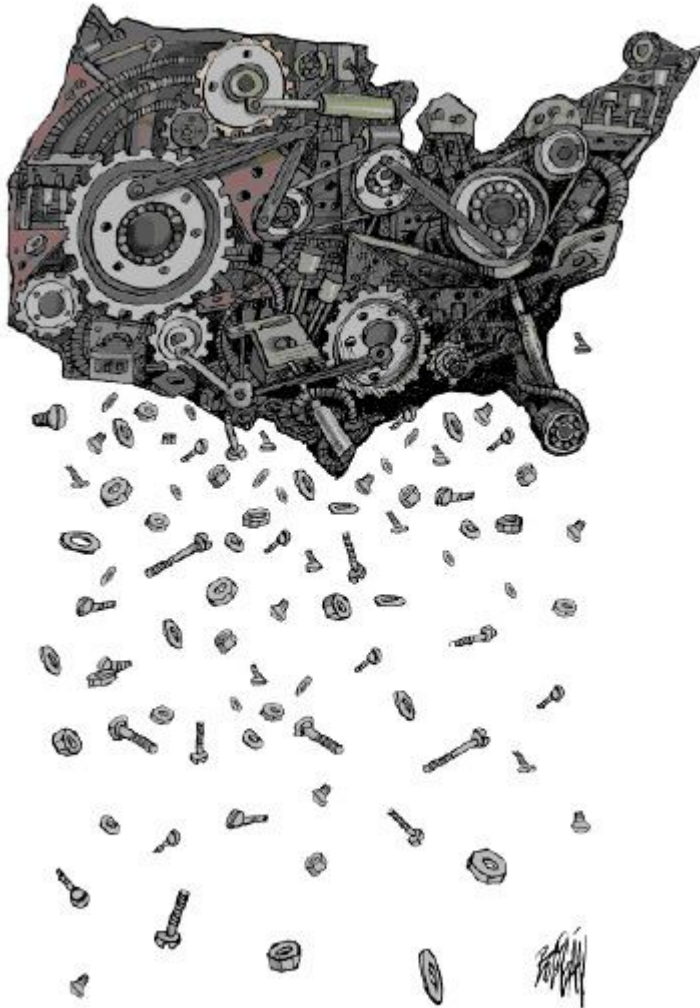


Century Marks

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IMMIGRANT USACagle Cartoons, El Universal, Mexico City

Bus tour: Modeling themselves after the Freedom Riders, who traveled by bus to protest segregation during the civil rights era, Soulforce Equality Riders took a 51-day bus tour this spring, stopping at 19 religious colleges and universities that restrict the freedom of homosexuals on campus. The tour was the brainstorm of Jacob Reitan, a Northwestern University graduate, who met a student from Wheaton College at a gay bar in Chicago a few years ago. The Wheaton student observed that if he were to come out of the closet at Wheaton it would result in expulsion from the

school. Some of the schools on the tour—like Brigham Young and Liberty universities—had the Soulforce members arrested. Others, like Wheaton, welcomed Soulforce and provided opportunity for students to interact with the group (*Chicago Tribune*, April 21).

The free press and democracy: When the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville traveled through America in 1831, he was impressed by the fact that even families on the frontier subscribed to newsweeklies. But the future of newspapers is very much in doubt, according to the *Economist* (April 22-28). Increasingly, younger people aren't reading newspapers at all. What news they get comes from Internet sources—or from Jon Stewart's *Daily Show*. Pressured by Wall Street, newspapers are increasingly cutting editorial and other staff in order to improve finances. Newspapers are adjusting to the realities of the new media by putting more of their content at their Web sites and by making their sites interactive—giving readers a chance to rate or respond to articles and to interact with the authors. Some analysts think that such participatory media are good for democracy.

The laughing Savior: In the recently published Gospel of Judas, Jesus laughs four times—twice at the group of 12 disciples and twice at Judas. His laughter is provoked by their unwitting obedience to a lower god. Scholars have linked the long-lost text to a second-century gnostic Christian sect called the Sethians. The group's name refers to their claim to be part of a saved generation linked to Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve. Similar themes, but without a focus on Judas, occur in two Nag Hammadi texts in which Jesus laughs unseen from above at the ignorance of persecutors pounding nails into his flesh on the cross. Irenaeus, a second-century church leader who knew of the Gospel of Judas, said that the gnostic Basilides, who was active in Alexandria between AD 117 and 138, also pictured the spiritual Jesus as laughing at the folly of persecutors after he transformed Simon of Cyrene to look like the earthly Jesus.

Out of gas? The president “is never going to solve the massive negatives he is suffering as a result of the war in Iraq,” says Dick Morris, columnist and Republican consultant. “His best shot is to distract Americans with a stellar performance in a new crisis, and the rise in gas prices comes along at just the right time.” But the president must seize the opportunity, says Morris. “Instead of lamenting high prices, he should pounce on the opportunity to lead America away from an oil-dependent economy. Using the sense of danger and vulnerability Americans feel as prices drive their family budgets out of whack, he can energize and lead the nation in the way

that he did so successfully after September 11.”

Value of a tree: A mature shade tree can save a homeowner \$80 per year in energy costs, according to one estimate. A homeowner in Washington, D.C., claimed that her energy costs jumped as much as \$120 per month after city workers mistakenly cut down a 60-foot oak tree on the east side of her house. Forestry experts say that trees cool the air, reduce pollution and absorb storm water runoff—as well as add to property values (*Christian Science Monitor*, April 26).

Church costs: Some churchgoers in Washington, D.C., say that their religious rights are being undermined because the city is cracking down on double-parking during church services (*Chicago Sun-Times*, April 26). A Methodist church in Dudley, England, was recently informed that it would have to pay a fee to put up a cross on its new building, because under national law a cross is an advertisement (*Chicago Reader*, April 7).

Loud Lutherans: “Do you know how to tell if someone is Lutheran?” asks Dennis Fakes, a Lutheran pastor. Answer: “When the minister cracks a joke during the sermon, a Lutheran will smile right out loud.” Fakes is a contributing editor for the *Joyful Noiseletter*, a monthly religious humor publication (RNS).