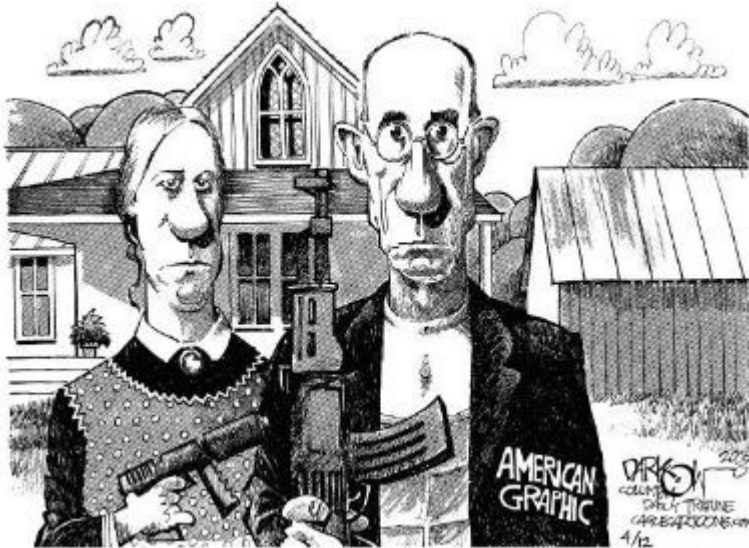


Century Marks

Century Marks in the [May 19, 2009](#) issue



“Gun Culture” © John Darkow, Columbia Daily Tribune, Missouri

Living with contradiction: As a youth Garret Keizer was troubled by his discovery of apparent contradictions in the writings of St. Paul. He raised this issue with his pastor, who agreed that Paul sometimes contradicts himself. Further, the pastor, pointed out a contradiction that Keizer hadn’t noticed: in Galatians 6 Paul says both that we are to bear one another’s burdens and that we are to bear our own burdens. But Keizer now doesn’t think this is a contradiction. We need both imperatives, Keizer says—we need self-reliance and we need social responsibility. “The trick is to get them to kiss” (*Harper’s*, April).

Dreaming dreams: When Susan Boyle, a frumpy-looking Scottish woman, admitted she has never had a boyfriend or ever been kissed, she got snickers from both the audience and the judges of *Britain’s Got Talent*, a talent show similar to *American Idol*. But then she blew away the audience with a magnificent rendition of “I Dreamed a Dream” from *Les Misérables*, a performance that has become a YouTube sensation. What is less well known is that Boyle has a learning disability, having experienced oxygen deprivation at birth (*ABC News*, April 14, and other sources).

What Cassie said: The Columbine school massacre generated a martyrdom story that helped some Christians to find redemption in that horrid episode that took place

ten years ago. A boy who witnessed the shooting of fellow evangelical student Cassie Bernall reported later that one of the killers asked her before shooting her if she believed in God. "Yes, I believe in God," she responded. But several other witnesses close to Cassie said this exchange didn't happen, and a 911 tape seems to indicate she didn't either. Still, the story caught on in the evangelical world, and Cassie's mother wrote a book, *She Said Yes*, which has sold over a million copies (review of Dave Cullen's *Columbine* in *New York Times Book Review*, April 19).

Animal rights on the right: Rush Limbaugh has created several public service announcements on half of the Humane Society of the U.S. One of the spots reaches out to communities of faith and urges people to be good stewards of all God's creatures. Limbaugh loves his cat, Punky, and he says compassion for animals should be a unifying American value. The Humane Society says its cause transcends political polarities and attracts Limbaugh and George Will on the right and Dennis Kucinich and Nicholas Kristof on the left (www.hsus.org).

The church goes on: In a letter responding to *Newsweek's* April 13 cover story on the "The End of Christian America," John W. Futterer, a Lutheran pastor from North Carolina, acknowledges a decline in religious commitment in the U.S. but says, "There are still many families and individuals who are committed: they still manage to make it to worship on most Sunday mornings, they juggle their schedules so their kids can attend Sunday school and youth-group meetings while still playing sports or taking violin lessons, they make quilts for Africa, build homes for Habitat for Humanity, serve in local soup kitchens or food banks, and spend their own money to go on mission trips" (*Newsweek*, April 27).

Christian America? Emergent church leader Brian McLaren wonders when it was that the U.S. was a Christian nation. Was it when Americans wantonly killed native peoples, taking their lands and breaking promises to them? Was it during the era of slavery or segregation, which were justified on biblical grounds? Was it when the U.S. dropped the first nuclear bombs on civilian populations? Or was it when the nation plundered the environment and turned a blind eye to torture? "Was it earlier this week, when I turned on the TV or radio and heard people scapegoating immigrants and gay people and Muslims?" asks McLaren (*Washington Post* "On Faith" blog, April 16).

Bench marks: There was only one Roman Catholic among the first 54 justices on the U.S. Supreme Court. Then for many years there was an unofficial "Catholic seat"

on the court, most recently occupied by the moderate liberal justice William Brennan Jr. Through a succession of appointments by Republican presidents, there is now a majority of Catholics on the Supreme Court. These Catholic justices, James Carroll maintains, are out of step with the generally progressive social teachings of the Catholic Church, and they are “poised to reverse precedents on antidiscrimination statutes, conservation, women’s rights, free speech, and government intrusions in the private lives of citizens” (*Practicing Catholic*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt).

North of the border: The total number of teenagers in Canada who identify themselves with the Anglican, Baptist and United churches is less than the number of those who say they are Muslim, according to a survey conducted by sociologist Reginald Bibby of the University of Lethbridge. The number of teens who identified themselves as members of “Other Faiths,” including Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism and aboriginal spirituality, grew to 16 percent last year, compared with 3 percent in 1984. Teens who claimed membership in the Roman Catholic Church or mainline Protestant denominations dropped dramatically. One-fifth of teenagers claimed to read the Bible or other scriptures at least monthly, while 43 percent said they check their horoscopes monthly or more often (RNS).

Auf Deutsch: German Christians are starting what they hope will be a record-breaking effort to use the new Internet social-networking service Twitter to distribute the Bible. During Kirchentag this month, a Protestant convention held every other year, Christians will be asked to “Tweet” their favorite Bible passage. Twitter (www.twitter.com) allows only 140 characters per message. Almost 2,000 people in southwestern Germany and Luxembourg participated in a church-sponsored Lenten car fast in which they abstained from using their cars. Instead they walked, cycled, used public transport or, if all else failed, opted for car sharing when traveling (ENI).

For better or for worse: The *Wall Street Journal* (April 9) reports there are a number of online resources that help couples write their wedding vows. These services typically ask each couple for information about themselves and attempt to tailor the vows to fit the couple. The vows take from six to 11 days to complete and cost between \$57.95 and \$165.