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On this day: Halloween

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NCR Today

On this day we light jack o'lanterns to ward off demons.

Growing up Catholic made me immune to scary movies. Constantly hearing about martyrs being roasted and racked and drawn and quartered made horror movies seem stupid and unimaginative. The only movie that scared me when I was a child was Disney's version of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.

Here it is. (The scary part starts in part 3.)

Part 1.

Part 2.

Part 3.

Part 4.

And on this day we wear masks.

"Stuff That Defines Us," an article by Carol Vogel, was on the front page of the Arts Section in the *New York Times* yesterday.

"It was a project so audacious that it took 100 curators four years to complete it. The goal: to tell the history of the world through 100 objects culled from the British Museum's sprawling collections. The result of endless scholarly debates was unveiled, object by chronological object, on a BBC Radio 4 program in early 2010, narrated by Neil MacGregor, director of the museum. Millions of listeners tuned in to hear his colorful stories ? so many listeners that the BBC, together with the British Museum, published a hit book of the series, 'A History of the World in 100 Objects,'" which was published in the United States last week.

One object that defines us humans is the mask. Click here to see the one selected for the book. Search term: mask. The Olmec Stone Mask, from 900 - 400 BC, which was found in south-east Mexico, is pictured on page 184. "This face is one that can still be seen in the descendants of the Olmecs living in Mexico today."

Two millennia after the little Olmec mask was made, "reformers would crack down on continuing pre-Christian practices and old rituals -- incantations, divination and mask-wearing were punished as sorcery or idolatry." Page 550.

Like all attempts to ban or limit mask-wearing, the one in Mexico was unsuccessful. Just like the one at the Synod at Constantinople in 692, those at Venice in the 11th century, Savonarola's bonfire of vanities in Florence in 1497, etc.

Happy Halloween to one and all!

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