2020: I'm So Sick of Superlatives

"2020: The Worst Year Ever," reads the cover of *Time* magazine's December 14 issue.

"There have been worse years in U.S. history," admits author Stephanie Zacharek, but not, to her way of thinking, since World War Two. Between a heavy hurricane and fire season, police violence and the accompanying protests, a circus of a presidential election, and a global pandemic, Zacharek opines, none but the oldest among us can remember a year nearly as bad.

Just how bad a given year was is, of course, a matter of opinion, but Zacharek's opinion on 2020 strikes me as overwrought in a way that's becoming increasingly typical of whiny American poor-us-ism.

Lately it seems everything has to be described in a superlative manner. Natural disaster. War. Police violence. Political craziness. You name it, we just can't seem to accept that it's part of a continuum. Everything absolutely, positively must be the mostest or the worstest of its kind, ever.

I don't remember World War Two. I don't even remember 1968. But that particular year lived on in our collective memory strongly enough, for long enough, that I remember (and sometimes still see) the shudders of those who lived through it. Some high points:

In January, nearly 400 people died and thousands were injured in an earthquake in Sicily. North Korean forces seized the USS Pueblo. The Tet Offensive began in Vietnam.

In February, police killed three students at a civil rights protest in Orangeburg, South Carolina.

In March, American troops murdered somewhere between 350 and 500 unarmed civilians at My Lai in Vietnam.

On April 4, Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. Riots ensued.

In May, seven weeks of mass unrest began in France and at least 46 tornadoes struck At least 46 tornadoes struck ten US states in one night, killing dozens and injuring thousands.

In June, Robert Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles, California.

July saw the first recorded cases in the 1968 H3N2 flu epidemic, which killed somewhere between 1 million and 4 million worldwide and as many as 100,000 in the United States (no, not as many as COVID-19, but the population of the US was less than 2/3 what it is now). It also saw four days of rioting in Cleveland, Ohio after a four-hour gun battle

between police and the Black Nationalists of New Libya left seven dead.

In August, more than 200 died in an earthquake in the Philippines, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia, and police rioted at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, abducting and injuring hundreds.

In October, soldiers opened fire on a protest in Mexico City, killing between 350 and 400, and 30 years of "The Troubles" kicked off after police in Derry, (Northern) Ireland, truncheoned civil rights protesters.

Yes, 2020 has been a pretty crappy year, but let's try to keep a little perspective here. There's never been a year that some people didn't think — at the time — was the worse year ever. And even if you can't think of a single good thing about 2020 right now, I can point at least one out for you: It's almost over.