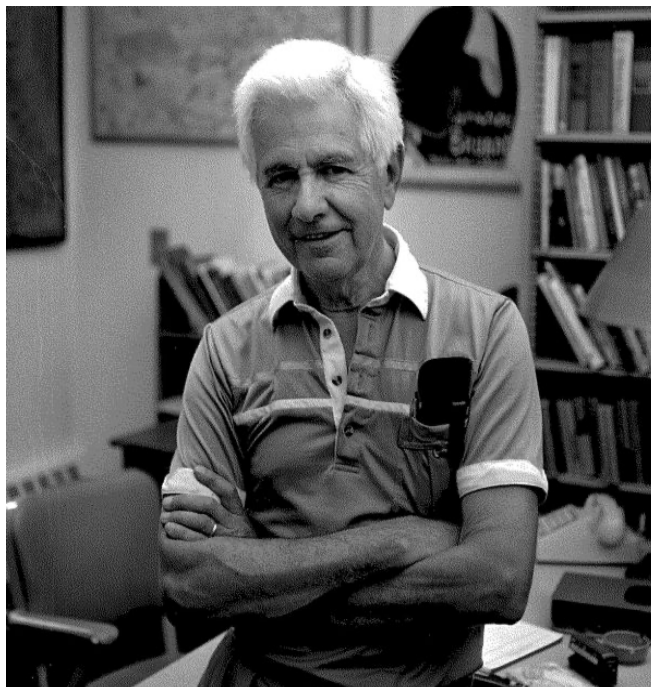


## David Moldstad

1923 - 2022

### His Editorial Letters to the Daily Record



During his long career as a beloved professor of English at the College of Wooster, David was also a committed civil rights proponent who supported many social justice causes throughout his life. Below is a record of his civic concerns demonstrated through a portion of his “Letters to the Editor,” found in the archives of the Wooster Daily Record.

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## **6/5/21: Divergent ideas key to preserving America's democracy**

A frequent topic of discussion is the threat imposed upon our democracy in today's political environment.

Democracy is far more complicated than a set of laws and statutes. At its fundamental root, democracy is a state of mind, and at its core, a healthy democracy and democratic ideals require a trusting state of mind and the telling of truths.

A healthy democracy requires trust in those whom we elect, even if those elected are not of our own choice. Today the element of trust is not evident in the behavior of our political parties, and that is a clear danger to our democracy.

Divergent ideas are to be respected in a democracy. They are to be considered and contested, not demonized. Instead of debating choices for what is good, we are asked to choose between truth and lies.

The perpetuation of democracy, not the supremacy of any political party, should be the ultimate goal. Political parties are essential to our form of government, but their attainment of power and control is not to be assured at all cost.

We have seen what has happened in other countries where political influence and power has been usurped by a single political party.

We must not confuse party power with natural good. Trust, especially with those with whom we disagree, must be restored.

Only when trust is renewed between political parties and the citizens they represent can the well-being of our remarkable democracy be assured.

David Moldstad, Wooster

## **6/20/21: Getting along peacefully means sharing, equality**

In our beginnings, Americans were largely homogeneous, Anglo-Saxon white.

No more. Today, we have large numbers of Black, brown, Asian and Hispanic people.

Though one ethnic group has the lion's share of the wealth, to get along peacefully, we are going to have to share. For our resources, though great, are not unlimited. Otherwise, we can look forward to more Minneapolis.

All groups must share — and this includes police departments. A law enforcement officer's job is not easy when every day may be your last, and ethnic knowledge can be useful in domestic disputes. We must have more and better trained police, for there is no denying the differences between ethnic groups, with differing customs and beliefs. Some find these differences interesting and can adapt. Others find adapting hard. But for peace, we must try if we do not want no-go zones in our cities.

Moreover, this is in our self-interest. For coronavirus microbes do not wield to bluster, as certain of our high officials seem yet to learn. For a stronger educational system would help all of us. A better educated country is a more powerful one.

But perhaps most importantly, we should act like we believe all people are created equal. We were seen to be quixotic for this belief and many expected us to fail. But with all this concentration on our exterior, is there still room for the soul?

David Moldstad, Wooster

## **4/11/20: A time of trials**

We are being tried by an invisible enemy, as are our kin the world over. But, we probably are not the last to be so tried.

As the English writer Thomas Carlyle notes in his volume, "Past and Present" (1843), there were uncomfortable similarities between the medieval setting of the book and his own time. Let us examine these, and see what parallels there are to our time.

Carlyle's "Past and Present" is overall a comparison between the life of Abbot Samson in a 12th century monastery at Bury St. Edmonds (near present day Salisbury), and the life of many a modern Victorian man: Shiftless morally, and often with no higher standard than profit and loss. Abbot Samson's ideals were worthy and honest, if not always ours.

In "Past and Present," Carlyle recounts an incident, which if not typical, is at least close enough to make us thoughtful.

As Carlyle tells us, a poor woman, deathly ill, came to a grand house seeking assistance, but was turned away because of her low class and appearance. She later died. But she infected all about her, at which point, Carlyle has her say, "You see, I was your sister."

I trust our system of hospitals and clinics would prevent such a scenario. But we are already overwhelmed, and who and for what reason will anyone be turned away?

It is indeed a time of trial. And perhaps time to ask ourselves whether Jefferson's "Pursuit of Happiness" is a sufficient goal.

And to make us see that, we are part of an ongoing global economy. This enables diseases such as coronavirus to spread more easily, and means they

must be fought globally. Experts have been warning us about such diseases, and more to come.

The world needs a leader who sees this global economy. Could it

David Moldstad, Wooster

### **6/27/19: History can help resolve abortion dispute**

Observing the seemingly endless dispute over abortion, with decent people on both sides, conservative guru George Will (Daily Record opinion page, May 5) suggests that perhaps our present mode of approaching the issue may be wrong. Right now. In our present take-no-prisoners way of seeing the question, one side must always lose utterly. Perhaps there are other ways of seeing the matter.

Instead, Will suggests profiting from solutions to thorny past dilemmas. And he offers Lincoln's options in 1865. Heaven knows Lincoln hated slavery. But he was also doubtless aware that an all-at-once abolition could present its own problems. Thus, he proposed a step-by-step abolition, differing in different times and places.

Many examples exist of too-precipitate or vengeful action after great crises. Only consider Versailles and its likely results. We can be proud of our country for its constructive Marshall Plan following World War II.

Can we not profit from the use of Lincoln's gradualism (as well as our Marshall Plan) in looking at problems today? And avoid approaching one of life's still-divine mysteries in terms better suited to legal abstractions?

David Moldstad, Wooster

## **4/11/19: Trump's attacks on McCain are uncalled for**

Like many of you, I was taken aback by President Trump's recent attacks on the late Senator John McCain (Daily Record, March 20 and March 23). For not a few of us, John McCain was what a man should be. And without question, he more than paid his dues to his country.

President Trump and he have apparently had their dispute, at times forcefully. That's politics. But as Truman once said, if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen. It's healthy for our country to have debate open and at least civil, unlike some countries overseas.

Perhaps McCain may have made mistakes in some of his arguments. We all do so. So be it. But I would believe he made them in good faith. In any case, I think the old Roman adage might apply here: *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* (Concerning the dead, say nothing but good things.)

David Moldstad, Wooster

## **1/30/19: President is the executive of all of us**

In the continuing controversy over the wall, President Trump shut down the government and idled federal workers, making them miss their paychecks twice in a row. May we respectfully suggest to the president that it is not his government but our government that he shut down, a joint enterprise. The shutdown should not be used as a weapon against a part of us.

Mr. President, you are the executive of all of us, not just those who voted for you. Excepting certain specified duties like treaties, Congress is the place for such controversial issues as the wall.

Our government differs from many similar structures in having checks and balances built in, these are not just happenstance. Surely here is a great opportunity for displaying this flexibility.

Now that the shutdown is over, at least temporarily, may we urge President Trump to further his negotiations, for we all support America in common even if we may be sometimes lukewarm toward you.

David Moldstad Wooster

### **12/25/18: George H.W. Bush had a common touch**

It's been a few weeks now since George H.W. Bush has passed. In the many tributes to him, one more thing might be added. For all his many strong points, he still had about him a touch of the common. No deficiency, this allowed him to see and feel the many small cares that many of his more enlightened peers might miss.

Born to privilege, he was yet one of us. When World War II broke out, he saw his duty like many Americans, though he might have deferred service because of family connections. He joined the Navy Air Corps and was shot down for his pains.

Though in high office, he remembered those back home. He spent hours answering his correspondence personally.

Though of different political persuasion, I never felt estranged from George H.W. Bush. If he sometimes erred, I thought it was from judgment, not from the heart. He took his presidency seriously and minded what he owed his forebears. So, hail and farewell, George Bush. May all your coming landings be happy ones.

David Moldstad, Wooster

### **9/6/18: Hail and Farewell, John McCain**

Let not this day go by without a tribute to John McCain. Soldier, statesman, and honest man, he served his country in many ways. He knew well that in going to the flight line, that day might be his last. And he endured long years in a Hanoi POW camp.



He lost his presidential bid, and accepted the results gracefully. I hope I do not overstate in thinking him a worthy successor to John and Abigail Adams and Abraham Lincoln.

As long as there are people like John McCain among us, the country will endure.

And so, Hail and Farewell, John McCain. And may God look kindly upon you.

David Moldstad, Wooster

### **8/1/18: Some questions about jail proposal**

The proposal for a new jail should give us pause, and make us reconsider our values as a people. Is punishment by incarceration our only course?

We already lead the world in prison population, both absolutely and per capita. In addition to our punitive mode being costly, there may be other ways of doing things. Our overseas democratic friends manage decently with much less cost, and far fewer in prison.

For our national health this needs rethinking. Are we a better society with this punitive burden? Is rehab an alternative? Is it possible that punishment answers some deep psychological need? Are we building something which will call for use?

May I single out for notice our policy toward drug offenses, at the time punished by jail. Yet there are other ways of dealing with this admittedly intractable problem. Some countries treat lesser drug offenses as medical, not criminal problems, providing treatment clinics and even sterilized needles, as a way of keeping control. To their credit, some states and even places right here follow this practice.

As we know, we live in an imperfect world, and we share wrongful urges right along with our often struggling users. In the face of no clear remedies, it seems

money might be well spent on rehab research and not on jails, with their uncertain record of reformation, for that is not their primary task.

Let us throw our weight behind rehab, as our best selves surely enjoin us to do.

David Moldstad, Wooster

### **6/10/18: Evil is being done in our name**

The United States, being a representative government, our elected representatives act in our name. It is thus dismaying to see our border guards, our own agents separating mothers and children in the name of the law (our law). Merely blaming the border guards, or the higher-ups directing them, is too easy. These border guards as well as their superiors, represent us. Therefore, willy nilly, we are involved in these actions.

Throughout the world there are exquisite evils beyond our reach. But I'd hope that our country would at least strive to be a moral example in the face of such evils. Many of our greatest forbearers have thought so. I doubt if Abraham Lincoln would have hesitated here.

We know that this will be no easy job, probably rebutting "experts" opinion. But as St. Augustine ("City of God") reminds us, good and evil are not polar opposites, they are mixed together in all of us as citizens, border guards, officials, everyone. And since we all share a common human nature, what our representatives on whatever level do, we do. But we are not helpless here. While our representatives must share our good and evil mix, they are most of them decent people. Let us urge them, however we can, to stop this evil, done at least in part, in our name.

David Moldstad, Wooster

### **3/28/18: Guns often used to abuse freedom**

Our freedom, so justly honored, sometimes limited by nature or by other men, is hard won. But like most human constructs, it is relative, not absolute, much dependent on wise choice. Extreme behavior can often spell trouble.

In this context, I see the Second Amendment (in our Bill of Rights), whatever it meant at the time of writing, it is inadequate for its job in the 21st Century. At that time, the possibility of another British invasion was genuine. But we survived and now the power relations are reversed. The Second Amendment, originally meant to defend us, is not doing so now. Only witness our recent school shootings. Our many guns hardly support freedom, they are often the abuse of freedom.

Meantime, technology has sped forward. Today's firearms are vastly more efficient than the 18th-Century models, and pose different problems. Later inventions, like automobiles and pharmacy products, are heavily regulated, and our freedom, far from being crimped, is enhanced thereby.

I would exempt hunting rifles from this discussion; they rarely threaten people. But handguns and battlefield weapons are another matter. Their purpose is to kill, period. Like it or not we are now an urban nation and thus more vulnerable. We need to look at the Second Amendment in the light of 21st Century reality. There is precedent in our history for doing so. Consider the Amendments on slavery.

Realizing that we are men and women and far from all-seeing, our early leaders provided for change through Amendments. May we take up this challenge, adapt sensibly to our present age, as they tried to do long ago?

David Moldstad, Wooster

## **2/1/18: Should health care be added to Bill of Rights?**

In the debate on the Affordable Care Act, attention is often focused on practicable or moral questions. But perhaps there is more to the situation, which may even affect our self-interest: our reputation for responding to human needs.

For many reasons, we are the only major industrial country that offers its citizens no inclusive health care. Some see this as contradictory, some praise it. Whatever, this stance is now part of our national image.

In the past, many of our forebears were drawn to America not just for a new start, but also for new opportunities, room for innovation, no hereditary aristocracy, and fewer social barriers, along with a more open government.

Many of our past leaders have made us proud by rising above a confining insularity to extend help, with no reward expected. Consider how we still honor Lincoln. Such past leaders help us see America as a special place.

However we see ourselves, surely we have ideas that American leadership could offer the world. And a reputation as a generous people can only boost our case for leadership. For America First has often meant and ought to mean more than matters of the economy, important as this is.

In this vein may I suggest that our bid for leadership would doubtless be enhanced if we were seen to regard human health as a right, alongside the other rights listed in our groundbreaking Bill of Rights itself.

David Moldstad, Wooster

## **12/20/17: Wall an unhelpful addition**

That we have problems on our borders with Mexico few will deny. But the question is what to do about them. For there are options. It is greatly to our advantage to have a friendly Mexico on the other side. The wall now in progress is needlessly insulting to Mexicans, not to mention talk of "thugs"

and "rapists." Whatever is intended, the wall detracts from our long-run security by making Mexicans less interested in it.

President Teddy Roosevelt advised speaking softly and carrying a big stick. We seem to have forgotten the speaking softly part. As he knew, much may be accomplished by friendship wisely offered. Besides we have many things in common with Mexico which could be exploited: its music, architecture, its cuisine (quite beyond the Tex-Mex most of us know), and many outstanding athletes.

No doubt dubious characters are among many coming through our borders at places like Tijuana. For we have extensive trade there and other places in seasonal foodstuffs, for example. And may we remember to judge would-be entrants with compassion, for Mexico is in the midst of a genuine drug war, and many are fleeing for their lives. While none of us know how to deal with it, perhaps we can help.

David Moldstad, Wooster

### **9/20/17: They are our neighbors, our children**

Who are our neighbors? This question was posed long ago, and was answered by the still relevant example of the Good Samaritan. But even our everyday life sometimes offers a chance to answer this question personally, in the matter of the children brought here underage, and now facing deportation. For surely those brought as children are our neighbors, in the original sense.

As a nation honoring the rule of law, action here must take seriously any questions such action may raise. But most of us are aware that unquestioned obedience to law in all cases may not always be wise or even possible. And thus we have judges for those difficulties, of which this is one. And finding germane exceptions can in actuality be support for the law, by revealing its human face.

I submit that here is such an exceptional case. Courts often allow mitigating circumstances, especially when juveniles are involved. And we are agreed (after contentious legal battles) that only those committing the crime should be charged. If we subscribe to these ideas, then those bringing in children, guilty of nothing, that is, the mothers, are the guilty ones, if guilty they are.

Further, and not incidentally, our national honor is involved here. We want to show the world that we judge individually and with awareness of differences, and not absolutely, which is the way of dictators. Wisely President Trump has deferred action here, referring the matter to Congress. May we hope and believe that Congress will act not only justly but compassionately with these now young adults? And once more affirm our commitment to our great human ideals we have so fortunately inherited?

David Moldstad, Wooster

## **7/25/17: We can learn from different viewpoints**

As I listen to President Trump's many and at times impolitic tweets, I am brought to think of a good idea he many times proposed as a candidate, the Art of the Deal. Great, I thought let's try it. For enduring deals offer a chance to come together to hear all sides, and a forum for hearing our opponent's ideas.

Few understood this better than Lincoln who, in a time real crisis, appointed his adversaries to his cabinet, to hear criticisms up front, as Doris Kearns Goodwin has shown in her splendid "Team of Rivals." She recalls for us the ongoing abuse Lincoln took during his difficult presidency. Yet for all that he was still able to call for "Malice toward none, and charity for all." O Father Abraham, where are you now?

Indulge me I ask, as I draw from my own background and remember St. Paul's admonition that "there are none without sin, no, not one!" Indeed, we know that nobody's perfect, that we need other voices for our own good (and please

pardon this smug language). We do ourselves no favor by rejecting others' ideas, often just because they are others." Our own Martin Luther King was not too proud to learn from Gandhi, a Hindu. King, being human, had his limits, as we all do as St. Paul has noted.

But this is perhaps fortunate. No saint, but a fellow struggler, with human limits he knew he needed every dissident helper and could share in our problems. It has been wisely said if we wait for every soldier to be pure, the Army will never march. And greatness like King's comes from the human mix we all have. A mix we share with President Trump and if I cringed when he discussed Angela Merkel, justly seen as one of Europe's canniest leaders, I hope I looked for the best.

For a nearby example, consider the world of science, which has long known better. Only recall the great Salk-Sabin breakthrough, made abroad. And further back, Galileo (Italian) and Newton (English).

So, let's seriously consider all sides with the Art of the Deal, and temper the bludgeoning partisanship, now prevalent in Washington. No doubt this is a mixed bag. But we have withstood storms before.

Surely, we can learn from Lincoln, Lincoln who seems truly to have understood " the Art of the Deal."

David Moldstad, Wooster

### **5/4/17: Compromise is a sign of strength**

Far from being a weakness, compromise is a sign of strength, it shows we have long-range goals, and are open to temporary concessions for gain down the road. Except for compromise, we might not have our Constitution as we know it. The three-fifths clause for counting African-American representation in the South was quite disagreeable in the Northern States, to say the least. But the need for a workable constitution was worth this temporary price.

We all know of significant issues on the national table, on which decent men and women disagree. Consider only abortion. Moreover, both liberal and conservative efforts offer reasons for caution. On the left, the blocking of controversial speakers at universities surely represents the antithesis of the free speech liberals say they champion. And on the right, the gerrymandering of voting districts so as to cripple the opposition is simply a disingenuous way of suppressing free speech, however legal. How compromise would be useful in both these cases.

Of course, we know none of us is in the right entirely. And compromise is there so we can draw on our best selves. Our present no-compromise partisanship in our national bodies is hardly a helpful tendency in the nation we say we honor.

David Moldstad, Wooster

### **3/28/17: Honoring the idea we are brothers**

In the debate over allowing those with different or even opposed cultural perspectives into America, let us go slowly. For we know, in our calmer moments, that we are not utterly self-sufficient, with no need for "alien" ideas. And that in some corner of us, we honor the idea that all men are brothers.

Surely we recall the nativist prejudice met by the Irish, fleeing deadly famine, or Southern Europeans, as too subservient to the Vatican, or the Russians and Poles, fleeing savage pogroms there. All peoples now seen as among our most valuable citizens. And yet today, Middle Eastern refugees face a similar nativist prejudice, as just too different.

Jefferson's sweeping vision in the Declaration, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their creator (not by men) with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is among our most respected landmarks. We see with pride his revolutionary departure from Locke's view that they are endowed with the right to life, liberty and property. That we are slow in



addressing Jefferson's vision is unsurprising, knowing that all governments, being human, are works in progress.

Still we hope and believe that many of us are on board here, in urging the worth of all peoples. And in wishing for our country the commitment to our truly great heritage, in those like Jefferson, Adams, and Franklin.

David Moldstad, Wooster

### **1/30/17: Humility seems to be lacking in our society**

As I watched the Inauguration Friday, I was again grateful for our magnificent republic and for the peaceful transfer of power which I saw taking place.

And while I did not vote for Trump I wish for his success, for to a great extent his success is our success.

Yet throughout this impressive ceremony, I waited in vain for some awareness that we are not all-powerful, that we owe allegiance to more than ourselves, that, as Micah has it (6:8) "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Humbly!

The very word seems quaint in our rush-rush society.

Quaint it may seem. Yet surely we can find room in our lives for this, if less than fashionable, but bedrock genuine, way of seeing things.

Pride has its place, yes, but certainly its problems too -- and dangers.

It is said that ancient Roman conquerors, returning in triumph through the city, were followed by one repeating over and over, "Remember, you are only a man!"

Good advice then, good advice now.

David Moldstad, Wooster

## **11/17/16: Tighter licensing of guns needed**

The random shooting of the Wooster student at the 1-71 rest stop brings up once more the problem of a society overloaded with guns, and thus easy access to them. The problem is not simply about banning guns. Guns are useful in the right hands: safety forces, the military and a few people in unusual situations. Guns for hunters is not even an issue here. The real question is whether the overloading of guns is not a public safety issue in itself.

We don't need to ban guns, merely to keep them under control, as we do with many other good, but potentially dangerous things, like automobiles and drugs. Just consider our handling of this most useful thing, the automobile. You can't drive legally unless you have a license. We don't allow licenses to those underage, or with physical impairments (like poor eyesight), or to persons carelessly at fault in certain fatal accidents. Such restrictions do not ban your right to own an automobile, they do affirm society's right to protect itself.

We should treat guns in the same way. They may be sometimes useful, as noted above. But like automobiles, they can and do kill. Such great power calls for regulation, and the obvious regulation here is tighter licensing. For public safety is clearly at stake.

Even the most sensible laws, including licensing, will not restrain these people. As many have said, the deranged and criminals do not worry about laws. The real answer is to have fewer guns in circulation, so they cannot so easily be got hold of. But since this solution is not available, for a number of reasons, the next best thing is to have tighter licensing, with the buyer and subsequent owner clearly known by name. This would give our safety forces greater tools for tracing guns and doing what they can to keep guns out of the wrong hands. Society surely has a right to protect itself.

With so many guns in circulation, this step will scarcely solve all problems of random shooting, as with the 1-71 incident. But it would help. Besides we do

not want to be touted as the country with the highest gun ownership in the world. We are surely greater than this. As it is, we are second only to Yemen in this unenviable role.

David Moldstad, Wooster

## **9/7/16: Money big problem in politics**

The recent furor over the Clinton Foundation is, I think, justified, but it should be seen as part of the larger problem of excessive money in politics, which diminishes the role of the individual.

The Clinton Foundation has accepted money from a wide range of sources, including foreign sources, and this is surely unwise even if legal. For donors like the Koch brothers are not naive. They want something for their money, often on matters of government policy, and this cuts into the influence of the ordinary not wealthy citizen.

This is the problem with the Clinton Foundation. But not only with the Clinton Foundation. For let's at least be fair. Let's consider the role of Citizens United, which allows corporations to give great amounts with no accounting. Corporations are said to be persons, who have no personal motives. But these donors (persons) are not naive either, they want something for their money. If we're going to ask about the Clinton Foundation (and it's quite proper to do so) shouldn't we also ask about Citizens United contributions, which are arguably much larger, but we don't know, for corporations need not account for their contributions?

As I mentioned at the outset, these problems are part of a truly major problem, which is acting to exclude most of us from any real role in government: too much money in politics. Candidates themselves have pressures to defer to big donors, regardless of their political or moral convictions, a troublesome reality of national and state governments today.

For the above reasons, questions about the Clinton Foundation, if they are considered straightforwardly, must be seen in context with Citizens United.

David Moldstad, Wooster

## **7/22/16: Provocative symbols, including Confederate flag, are not helpful**

As we think over the Confederate flag issue, its past and present symbolism, we are brought to remember that all living things change. Our own government, which we so fortunately enjoy, is (like all human institutions) partial, imperfect, a work in progress, moving to a future we cannot know. Our founders, in their wisdom, allowed for this living structure to change, with amendments, as values shifted and new circumstances arose. And this brings me to the Confederate flag issue.

For whatever the Confederate flag once meant, as the flag of the Army of Northern Virginia or perhaps even the larger Confederacy, its growth is now stopped in time, and what it meant then must stand. And what it most stood for was a republic including a defense of slavery. Following are quotations from the Constitution of the Confederate States of America (1861).

From Article IV, section III: "The institution of Negro slavery, as it now exists in the Confederate States, shall be recognized and protected by the (Confederate) Congress." Or again, Article IV, Section II: "The right of property in said (Negro) slaves shall not / impaired." And there are more such observations.

Whether, if the Confederacy had lasted, these views would have altered we cannot now know. But the Confederacy, and the flag symbolizing it, did cease its historical existence in 1865. In other words, it ended as a living element then, unlike our living and changing government. The words of its Constitution remain unchanged, whatever the views of its later adherents. It is no disregard for the memory of the men, North and South, to point out the

anomaly of the Confederate flag as a national symbol in 2016. We have all moved past 1861 in our notions of human rights.

I would therefore suggest that it is a needless affront to our African-American brothers and sisters to promote this symbol of the slave power at an affair meant to welcome all people. Moreover, the flag has been somewhat debased in our time, having often been co-opted by groups holding ideas of which the best men and women, North and South, would not have been proud.

Especially after recent events in Dallas, New Orleans and Minneapolis, any display of provocative symbols is simply not helpful. We have so many great and unifying symbols and words that exalt our country, words like Jefferson's "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator (not by any body of men) with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." America is fortunate to have a heritage of such unifying words and symbols. Let us unite around symbols like these.

David Moldstad, Wooster

### **4/2/16: Senate inaction unwelcome precedent**

The blocking of President Obama's nomination to the Supreme Court, by refusing to consider it, is a challenge to one of our most useful and time-tested American institutions: the separation of powers. Our Founding Fathers, taking account of human nature as it is in believing oneself in the right, wisely divided the powers of government, so that the branches were independent of each other, and could serve as checks on each other's actions.

Many important functions can be proposed by one branch (like treaties) but must be validated by another branch. And so it is with the Supreme Court. The President (the executive branch) may propose a nominee, but another branch (the Senate) must confirm the selection. Any effort to evade this separation of powers system (one of the bulwarks against tyranny) is to frustrate one of the most probing and useful of our Founding Fathers' visions.

One of the things to be hoped for in the Supreme Court is that it is above politics. Perhaps this is hoping for a lot, but politicization of the Court is surely unfortunate. It takes away its intended function as an independent branch of government, uncontrolled by Congress or the President, and it diminishes respect for its opinions, to say nothing of its flouting of one of our truly workable institutions: the separation of powers. Thus one may hope that this challenge to the president's nomination of Garland to the Court is seen as unwise, is in the long run in neither party's interest, and will set a most unwelcome precedent.

David Moldstad, Wooster

### **9/17/15: Iran treaty better than nothing**

There are no easy answers for the Iran dilemma. We lack God's vision; we cannot read the future. But as mere men and women, we must play the odds. And the odds favor an imperfect (that is, human) treaty with Iran over nothing. Talks of more sanctions, like premature military action, are unreal.

Sanctions didn't work before, and there's no reason to think they'll work now. Iran may cheat, it is said. Very likely. But as Horatio told Hamlet in the old play, no ghost need come from the grave to tell us this. The likelihood of their cheating is the reason for the long negotiations about verification.

We are just now concluding a long and largely unsuccessful course of sanctions against Cuba, which few but ourselves paid much attention to, not even Canada. Also, the effect of sanctions is complex. We hurt the average Cuban, but may even have fortified the communists, by allowing them to point to us as bullies. Thank Heaven, we did not use this approach after World War II. Under American leadership, we used the Marshal Plan, instead of punishment, as in World War I.

It cannot be helpful to defy our friends and go it alone. In the 21st century oceans are no longer a protection, planes fly over them all the time, and so can nuclear missiles. Besides, in a dozen years Iranians may come to like American things. It's the Iranian middle-class forces that want this treaty, not the Ayatollahs. Most Ayatollahs, like many of our deniers, want nothing to do with it.

No one accuses the deniers of the Iran treaty with wanting war. No one wants war, that goes without saying. But we humans do make mistakes, we as well as the Iranians. We might remember Micah's advice (6:8) to walk humbly before God, and not in our pride, think that we can turn down reasonable chances, we're so in control of things.

Many problems face us right now, we need not lay ourselves open to more, by seeking confrontational answers rather than (imperfect as it is) a treaty involving compromise.

I write this in the hope that we will do what is best for the best long-range interest of our country, and not plunge into outright rejection. Our leaders have been statesmen in the past. Let us pray that they are statesmen still.

David Moldstad, Wooster

### **5/16/15: Tent City gone; issues remain**

I'm sure I'm not alone in my sense of defeat when people were evicted from Tent City. I blame no one, and I myself only talked about it. But we've allowed ourselves to think that here is a problem solved when in fact it's still with us.

Traces of their debris left behind are shown being removed, but no word on where the people have gone. Only one observant Letter to the Editor has pointed out that this is no cause for rejoicing, rather it's a sign of our quandary in dealing with those we call (when we're polite) alternate people.

All of us have our pride, and we can only hope that whatever measures of help are extended, these people will have their dignity and pride respected. I trust that in our society we still have room for alternate, independent types.

Like most of us, the Tent City people were probably of many sorts -- some reasonable and good workers and some not, and some unable to rise after strings of bad luck and personal betrayals. Doubtless many were not well off.

But among the ways in which a society is judged is by its dealing with its vulnerable members. And I hope that the advice about dealing with "the least of these" still applies.

David Moldstad, Wooster

#### **4/15/15: Columnist leaves out sharing society**

John Stossel's column in the "Record" (March 16) on the validity of the status quo in life's fairness almost wholly omits mention of what makes life meaningful. Most of his examples deal with a free and fair chance at money, as if that is all we want.

But with all his statistics on fairness, there is an aridity about his essay, a lacking sense that men and women live not just individually but in society. If our neighbor is less fortunate or less well-endowed it concerns us.

To use time-honored language, we are our brother's keeper, and this is a freedom, too. Stossel cites as one justification of the fairness of social ranking that we are not all born with equal abilities. True enough, but it's worth noting that we do not create ourselves, either. If we are born with superior genes or more money, that is our good luck, but it's not our merit.



Some humility is in order here, perhaps national as well as personal. Fortunately, the merciful make no such distinctions. If we all had merely our fair due, few of us might pass the test.

Stossel may say that he's simply discussing fairness here, and the ill effects of government efforts at change. True, government missteps occur; government workers are human. But government actions dealt with legal slavery and child labor, not waiting for evolving standards of fairness. Limiting government can be a worthy goal, but too often it has meant losses for the most vulnerable, about whom Stossel does not talk.

Even Hayek, no friend to government planning, saw the use of government help for those who through malign conditions, could not sustain a livable standard of living. Possibly Stossel would agree with this.

But it's worth seeing that standards of fairness and limited government are insufficient. Our vast inequality makes the likelihood of sharing less likely, regardless of fairness. And human beings need this sharing for full lives.

David Moldstad, Wooster

## **12/30/14: Writers of Bill of Rights mean what they wrote**

In Article IV of the Bill of Rights, the Second Amendment, it reads: A well-regulated Militia, being necessary for the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed." This is what it says, and this is what it means.

This article has been extrapolated to mean more than it says, in defending gun rights and even concealed weapons. Debate is quite proper, but embellishing Article IV for its support is misuse.

For "a well-regulated militia being necessary for the security of a free state" is an absolute clause, governing what "the right of the people to keep and bear arms" means. As an example: "My leg being broken, I cannot walk." "I cannot walk" depends for its meaning on "My leg being broken." The article IV statement is a parallel. "The right of the people to keep and bear arms" is limited in its meaning by "a well-regulated Militia being necessary for the security of a free state."

There may be cases where it is necessary to expand upon the wording (or lack thereof) in the Bill of Rights. But this is no such case. The writers had been through a Revolutionary War. That they chose not to include guns in their statement can hardly have been an oversight.

But even if an expansive reading be granted the Second Amendment (i.e., this is what the writers must have meant), there are still grounds for restraint in the main constitution. For in the Preamble, among the six reasons for the establishment of this document, is the "promotion of the general welfare." With our unacceptably high murder rate and our many public shootings, I submit there is a prima facie case for limiting guns, to promote the general welfare.

To be sure our forebears had guns (more often rifles) but they were for use: hunting for food and prow protection in isolated places against armed attack, not merely for diversion or to repel a stranger's assault. Now a high proportion of gun deaths are from acquaintances or estranged family members, let alone accidents.

To protect the public we need to make responsible owners and manufacturers of guns, and have them register, with those with a history of violence or mental disturbance excluded. This is Congress' job, if they can ever overcome their subservience to the National Rifle Association.

David Moldstad, Wooster

## **10/10/14: Be true to ideals in war of ideas**

As air strikes in the Middle East go forward, I hope we see that such measures, though needed right now, are temporary. For essentially this is a war of ideas, in some ways like the war against communism. It will not be a short war, and in opposing the Middle East violence we must try to see clearly.

This is, in the long run, a war of persuasion. And as with communism, we must use our strongest weapons: our free institutions and our tolerance for difference.

Ideas are powerful and nowadays they travel swiftly around the world. Potential friends in Tehran and Beijing are texting right now. Let us open to them our best selves, and not subvert our great past examples of life's possibilities with such acts as Guantanamo Bay and the interdiction of children fleeing the violence in Central America. Such acts are not only cruel in themselves, they undermine our national honor and despoil our image as upholders of freedom.

In this war of ideas, we must be true to our own ideals, one of the best of which is tolerance. Some say that Islam itself is the evil, and this is where the struggle should be. Here I must differ. For I believe our real foe is not Islam (which takes in much more than the Middle East) but the distortion of Islam by power-hungry religious zealots for political ends.

Our own religions have been distorted too, and things have been done in their names of which we are not proud. I have known decent Muslims personally and have been in their homes. And who can read the story of Malala, the Pakistan Muslim teenager, shot by the Taliban for wanting an education, without seeing that their home had values we can all share.

Our ideas of tolerance seem to fare poorly in the Israeli-Palestinian standoff. But I am sure there are far-seeing Israelis and far-seeing Palestinians who,

though marginalized by extremists right now, could help in this war of ideas if given the chance.

Once more, in this impasse of ideas, we must put our best foot forward, lead by example, and demonstrate, not just by words, but by deeds that act out our ideals, that their intolerant way of life is second best. Potential friends will hear.

David Moldstad, Wooster

### **9/16/14: Environment still needs our attention**

In his column in The Daily Record Sept. 2, John Stossel argues that environmentalism now constitutes government over expansion and is too costly. To his credit he sees that the environmentalists have done good things (cleaning the Hudson River and improving air quality) but it's time for them to scale back, because they encourage government overreach and their work is too costly. Yet fundamentally he understates the problems we face now and in the future.

For attention to the environment is not a mere fixing of immediate problems, important as that is. Shepherding our environment (our setting for life) is a task that is permanent in an industrial civilization and can only become more so.

If in our carelessness we take short-term profits that despoil our environment we will pay a price, as we already have with open pit coal mining in West Virginia or the BP drilling disaster in the Gulf. We should be stewards of our earth, not predators. As for the cost, vaccination is costly too, but consider the alternative. It is instructive that Adam was made a gardener, not a hunter, in the first garden.

The question of too much government is real, and I do not dismiss it. But government can be useful and even essential in situations of scale, where private action is unlikely.

David Moldstad, Wooster