

Quick takes

A day without immigrants

Why take your kids out of school? What does that show? Don't go to work. Close down your business. Do what you feel you need to do, but don't put adult issues on your kids.

— Nicole Wolf

I did not send my kid to school because she needs to learn how to be supportive to her culture and friends who doesn't have the fortune of being legalized. Because of deportation the ones who are going to suffer most are our kids. A lots of them were brought very little and they don't know their country of birth.

— Fabiola Rios Olivias

I wish people would understand that he is cracking down on illegal immigrants, not all immigrants. And the sweeps were going on during Obama's administration also. Were there protests for those?

— Judy Gormley

Just because they didn't go to school today does not make them illegal. They made a conscious decision to support an immigration law they feel is unjust. To assume that every Latino who didn't go to school is illegal just goes to show the level of ignorance in our community.

— Ray Gonzalez

Every country has immigration laws. Is there a reason why only the United States should not have and enforce those laws?

— Helen Willis

Peaceful protests are a fundamental right whether you agree with the protesters or not. If you find yourselves angry about massive riots and now you find yourself equally as upset with peaceful demonstrations or protests please understand it's that narrow minded thinking that is the real problem. Not every opinion is yours.

— Dave Kellie Webb

I totally support legal immigration but I don't support illegal activity of any kind. Am I perfect? No! But that doesn't mean I try to justify my wrongdoing. If I speed that is illegal. If I get caught I pay the consequences. I don't protest and try to make everyone justify what I did.

— Dani Smith

The people who participated in today's protest know exactly why they were protesting. The point was to show people what a day without an immigrant would look like. Regardless of how any of them came here, they do not condone the deportation of so many people and destruction of families.

— Selene Torres-Medrano

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week's takes. Tweet yours @Tim_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

Of Yoruba chickens, the god Ogun and taxis

Is it possible for a nation to embrace all manner of modern (read Western) ways without losing its soul?

Well, the Japanese and the Vietnamese and the Koreans have learned best practices from the western world and improved upon many without sacrificing their own cultural heritage. Toyota, a victorious North Vietnam and Samsung, anyone?

Actually, I had earlier learned much of this sensibility from my Peace Corps experience in Nigeria. Early on, I was struck with the care that Nigerian taxi cab drivers gave their cars, mostly small four-door British-made Morris Minors.

Back in the 1960s, Nigerian roads were most often bits of asphalt and gravel between large potholes that could swallow a cow. Yet the Morris Minors all looked new, with some of them having a couple hundred thousand miles on them — they were spotless. And when the driver got in, they started immediately, without a whimper, like "Let's get going!" The drivers were like proper horsemen; their cars seem to intuit them. And like a good horse, the cars seemed to love to work.

But the lesson was driven home to me late one afternoon when I was taking a cab ride back to Ibadan. Somewhere out in the hinterland we were banging along through a village when suddenly the driver swerved to the right and smack, killed a chicken! He then mumbled something and touched an amulet hanging around his neck.

I asked him what had just happened. He explained that he had just made a blood sacrifice to the great god Ogun, the Yoruba tribe's god of war and thus of iron, like his Morris Minor.

Indeed, I later learned that in the Yoruba religion Ogun is the traditional orisha or deity of hunters, blacksmiths and drivers.

At that moment, I knew for fact certain that there was no such thing as a "Western technological know-how" that the then-Third World (now "developing countries") would have difficulty learning; that somehow their home cultures would necessarily hold them back; that if their better angels had the edge then former colonial nations could prosper.

If it wasn't for the terrible political geography of a nation created in 1889 by a colonial power out of whole cloth and a map of the Niger River, and the endemic "Dash me, mista?" corruption of Nigeria, the country could now be another South Korea in the making.

And, in fact, with its population of 174 million and Gross National Product of \$1 trillion, and despite swerly leadership, bureaucratic rigidity and a troubled judicial system Nigeria sometimes seems like a country ready to take off.



TOM
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Comment



Photo courtesy Tom Hebert

Tom Hebert in Kano, Northern Nigeria in 1963. He worked as an advance man, organizing national support network for the University of Ibadan Shakespeare Traveling Theatre tour.



Photo courtesy Tom Hebert

Tom Hebert, near Calabar, Eastern Nigeria in 1964 sharing a taxi with friends.

Here's what my very own Central Intelligence Agency says:

"Nigeria has emerged as Africa's largest economy but economic diversification and strong growth have not translated into a significant decline in poverty levels, however — over 62 percent of Nigeria's 170 million people still live in extreme poverty. And despite its strong fundamentals, oil-rich Nigeria has been hobbled by inadequate power supply, lack of infrastructure, delays in the passage of legislative reforms, restrictive trade policies, an inconsistent regulatory environment, a slow and ineffective judicial system, unreliable dispute resolution mechanisms,

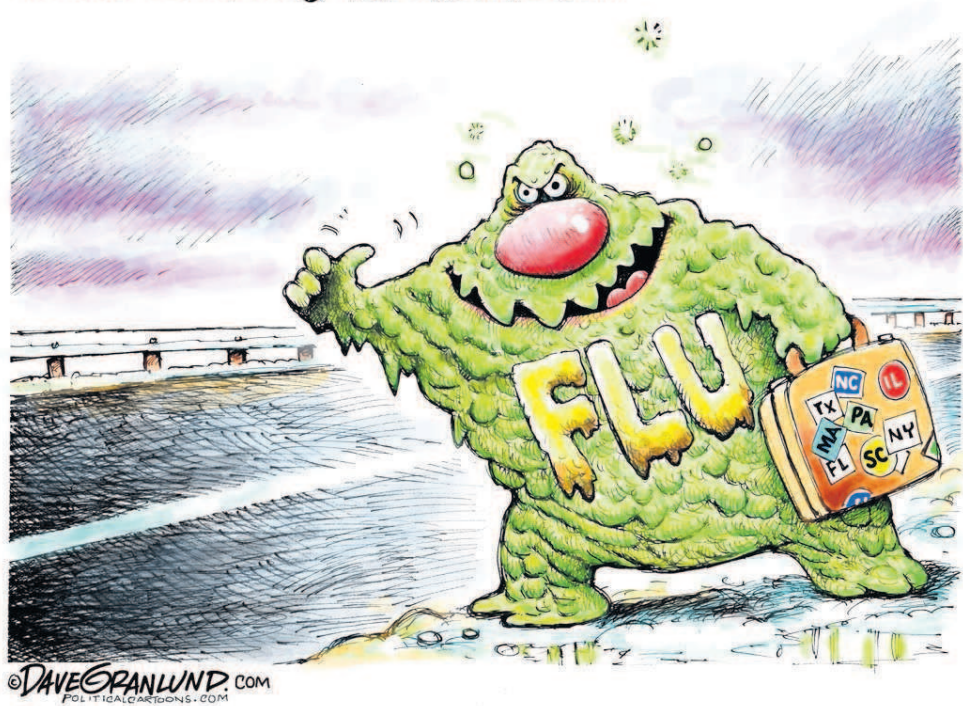
insecurity, and pervasive corruption."

There's also vicious Boko Haram, which aims to establish an Islamic state at any cost. It "opposes any political or social activity associated with Western society, including voting, attending secular schools, and wearing shirts and trousers."

And what about those Morris Minors? Let's just say that the 1963 event with the chicken blood sacrifice sent my mind in interesting new directions — making me more modest in my Americanism.

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Cross country hitchhiker...



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The HAND that FEEDS HIM...

Happy 108th birthday, Wallace Stegner

Wallace Stegner lived through almost the entire 20th century and wrote his way through more than half of it. His fan mail started with a trickle in the 1930s, opened up to a flow in 1943, after the publication of "The Big Rock Candy Mountain," and then rushed like the rivers he loved until his death on April 13, 1993. Many letters came on his birthday, Feb. 18. Today, they are preserved with the rest of his papers at the University of Utah's J. Willard Marriott Library.

The letters arrived by plane from Kenya, Japan and England, and by hand from Los Altos Hills, California, where Stegner and his family lived when they were not traveling or spending the summer at their cabin in Vermont. Book clubs from across the nation wrote to Stegner, from the Literary Ladies of Hyde Park, Vermont, to a Vietnam veterans' book club in New York City that enclosed 25



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copies of "Angle of Repose" with a request for Stegner's signature on all of them because the book had "left a deep-seated impression" on all 25 members of the club.

Many letters asked for autographs, some confessed love, and one was written by a couple on their honeymoon. A British fan of Stegner's "Women on the Wall" included this brief review of the book: "I think it is lovely, so do my friends, we all hope you make masses of money, and pay no tax." Among the thousands of letters that readers wrote, the theme that recurs over and over again is that Stegner respected his readers, their lives and the places they inhabited.

Most profoundly, he was capable of writing about heartbreak without succumbing to nihilism. His characters suffered real pain, and many of them failed. But Stegner's characters sometimes went beyond the failures, if only by one step, and he never fell into cheap sentiment.

As a woman wrote after finishing "Crossing to Safety:" "It

has something to do with bonds and frailties, a sense of place and events unfolding, and above all, endurance."

Stegner respected those who fell into the abyss and saw it for what it was, but endured nonetheless.

Stegner also told hard truths to his readers — particularly his readers in the West — about the region's past and present. Decades before the "New Western Historians," several of whom acknowledged his influence and corresponded with him, Stegner brought serious and critical attention to the settling of the West. He could criticize the region from within; in the words of a man who wrote to him in 1978, he could "handle the region's culture without condescending to it."

As one of his most famous readers, his friend and former student Wendell Berry, put it in his

1990 collection of essays, "What are People For?," Stegner was a regional writer "who not only

"I think it is lovely, so do all my friends, we hope you make masses of money and pay no tax."

— Fan letter to Wallace Stegner

(wrote) about his region but also (did) his best to protect it, by writing and in other ways, from its would-be exploiters and destroyers." Berry contrasted Stegner with the "industrialists of letters" who mine "one's province for whatever can be got out of it in the way of 'raw material' for stories and novels."

A woman from Montana told Stegner, "Somehow I have a sense of the land from reading your book that I have not found in a long time, and the urge to tell you that looking back to the years when I was an unprepossessing small girl suffering some of the same mental tortures that you seemed to, I figuratively wave to you across the prairie miles that lay between us.

You have used your background well — the prairie and I are proud of you."

If wisdom is simply pulling back the curtain to reveal a howling empty wasteland, 20th century fiction was full of such debilitating wisdom. Stegner was generally agnostic about any ultimate reality, but refused doubt as an excuse for selfish despair. There were too many people who had fallen in love with the land, and who counted on him; there were too many places that were threatened and fragile. In one of his most famous phrases, he described the West as the "geography of hope." Letter after letter thanked Stegner for his sympathy, but also for his thoughtful nudge to move past the pain and live.

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