

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Spring 2017

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Whose Rage Is It?

After a spate of books about Black oppression, shame and anger, what happened? President Obama released a few Black federal prisoners. Actually, very few, when you consider the number who are incarcerated. Black unemployment, health status, opportunity, longevity, child poverty? Ho Hum. About the same as usual.

Now the spate of books about White anger. *Hillbilly Elegy*, *Deep South*, *White Trash*, *Evicted*...they are numerous. All "discover" a group of people who have usually been considered of little consequence. They posit that marginal white people -- well, mostly me -- are angry at losing their dominance over women and Blacks, are angry at their falling economic status and lost jobs, are angry because they feel ignored by those corrupt politicians in Washington. The presumed reasons are numerous. But "those people" are certainly angry. One common trait of all these books is that they characterize angry whites as "other" -- even the ones written by those who "escaped" and went to college and found opportunity and good jobs. "These people" are different from you and me, the readers. There's a strong smell of superiority. To paraphrase Fitzgerald, "The very poor are different from you and me. They have less money." Less money and more anger.

What can white anger do? Well, it can elect a president. That's not exactly

powerless. The recent book *White Rage* by Carol Anderson, goes deeper. She demonstrates that white anger is not the sole province of the marginal poor. She shows how one piece of civil rights legislation after another, from reconstruction to *Brown v. Board of Education*, to the Voting Rights Act, have been systematically de-fanged by the white power structure. One small ordinance here, a small rule change there, a smidgen of change, and Eureka! *Brown* is transformed into segregated schools for everyone! And not only in the South. This diminution of civil rights has been occurring without much fanfare, all across the nation. Political culture, it seems, responds whole-heartedly to the demands of marginal whites. From small policies like local zoning ordinances, to widespread policy like drug law and who gets farm aid and who can vote, the laws have the effect of keeping Black people out. Even when the effect is to disenfranchise white people, even Republicans, the voting limitations are flaunted as victories. Dr. Anderson's book is carefully researched and definitely worth reading.

Whatever happened to Kansas, we ask? We see now that marginal and not-so-marginal people are willing to vote against their own interests to support politicians who will hold the line against Black or brown opportunity. The supposedly powerless have power no one knew they had. And how can they be

controlled? They haven't got much, so they aren't threatened with the loss of assets. They aren't respected, or even noticed much, so they just get angrier if they lose what little respect they once had. They already owe the courts for unpaid fines and restitution, so those penalties don't scare them. Their jobs are already gone. Even their tax refunds are taken for back child support or unpaid student loan debt, so they can't be taken away. Same with their Social Security checks. A lot of them don't even vote, so that privilege can't be taken away either.

We should not be asking ourselves why "those people" are so angry. That should be obvious. Rather, why do politicians pay so much attention? Why are they ignoring polling that says most Americans are in favor of true justice for immigrants, less Black incarceration, universal health care and the rights of women to control their own bodies? Why are they going after one minority group after another -- wait, women aren't exactly a minority -- to assuage the rage of white men and the women who support them? Whose rage is it, anyway?

I look forward to the next spate of books about Angry White Politicians. Maybe they are the ones we should really fear. ✂

—Carol "Junkyard Dog" Thompson
is a former Johnson County Supervisor

Looking Back and Going Forward

In the January 2017 Prairie Progressive, my friend Jeff Cox was critical of President Obama and Hillary Clinton. Before I cast blame on Obama/Clinton, I wonder if but for 80,000 or so votes we would be having a different discussion?

The election was not a “nationwide rejection.” Clinton, of course, won the popular vote. True, we got beat at every level, but responsibility also rests with the local/state level and not some national policy or all blame laid on the top of the ticket.

“Wrong direction polling.” Not sure what I think of the pre-election polling I saw. I do know support for Congress was barely in double digits and Obama enjoyed popular support. I think Jeff is not giving sufficient recognition of the GOP hold on Congress. From Obama’s day one, they had one mission in mind: obstruction.

Big Banks. Easy to scapegoat, but like it or not, they do play an important role in our economy. Hindsight tells us the bailout produced positive results. Hindsight: Obama administration mistake: failing to have the Justice Department going after those at the top who were responsible for the mess to begin with. I suspect those in the administration fearful of derailing a recovery with a prosecution carried the day.

Obama’s economic stimulus. Yes, it should have been more. I agree with the Nobel prize recipient, Paul Krugman, who urged a far greater stimulus. But the evidence is overwhelming the stimulus not only helped but among other things saved thousands of auto jobs in Detroit.

It is not fair to blame Obama for failing to achieve an increase in the federal minimum wage. When would this have passed the Congress? With unemployment where it was during Obama’s first couple of years, it would have made poor policy. There were very few economists suggesting raising the minimum at the beginning of the recession made any sense. And thereafter, good luck on getting anything through a GOP Congress, half of whom oppose minimum wage.

Blaming Obama for trade deals? International trade is a scapegoat. It is a good thing for most Iowans. Jobs were leaving the country long before NAFTA. That is hardly in America’s interest. Ask the Dyersville workers who made toys. TPP: certainly China was pleased to see this get put aside. Ask the historians where Smoot Hawley took us. Protectionism? Higher prices for consumers? I respect Schiller and a few others with different opinions. Certainly treaties with stronger protection of worker rights and the environment are desirable. At all levels we collectively need to do a better job at getting more facts and fewer slogans on the table when discussing trade.

Jeff claims there was Dem cooperation with GOP austerity programs. I don’t think he is giving the GOP majority enough credit. I support the Dems who worked to achieve what was possible when in the minority.

Obamacare: Wow! Jeff’s criticism bowled me over. (“Designed to fatten the profits...”) What about the millions now with insurance that didn’t have it before? What about abolition of pre-existing care

disqualifiers? Staying on parents’ policies until 26? And the list goes on. Sure plenty of room to improve it. Just as Social Security and Medicare were improved. But improvement takes a Congress where “compromise” is not a dirty word. Subsidized health insurance? SSI seems to work for millions. I agree the ideal would be a federally guaranteed system to provide affordable, accessible, and quality health care for all. But beating up on those who have moved us (and millions of people) forward on the path does not make sense to me. The GOP plan calls for “access” with no mention of “affordable” or “quality.”

Failure of economic policies. “...they put interests of the wealthy...” Jeff implies policy was driven primarily by the wealthy class who “fund” Dem campaigns. Let’s agree Citizens United is very much a root cause of the growing power of money in politics. We can never match the GOP billionaires.

And may we agree that some who did not vote for Hillary did not understand the impact on the Supreme Court President Trump has?

Tomorrow: Yes, Bernie Sanders’ message hit home with many. We need to incorporate some of his ideas going forward. We need to strive for the ideal. But doesn’t moving forward also impose a responsibility to lay out what is possible and the barrier in front of the ideal? Obama’s message of hope cut through lots of layers. But he took office with millions having unrealistic expectations. I think the person that can articulate a message of hope and a pathway can and will prevail.

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Immigration Reflections from a Fois Gras Goose

Michael Zmolek's piece did not surprise me, but finding it in the January *Prairie Progressive* shocked. Last summer, I subscribed to *The New Yorker* and *New York Times*, so I am conversant with the Liberal party line. Plus, I have listened to NPR for years, which so unabashedly supports immigration that they have hired a reporter with a Pakistani accent.

When he finally got around to admitting causality, Zmolek listed union dismantlement as #7 rather than the #1 factor it is. Or almost admitting it-- he mostly admitted mitigations. Years ago (25 or 30, I don't recall exactly) *Harper's Magazine* did a piece on immigration outlining the connection between pressures on unions and business agitation causing Washington to turn a blind eye to (then) ever-increasing levels of it. Immigration is God's gift to business. Rather, government's.

Zmolek refused to accord any responsibility for the collapse of the middle class, proceeding lo, these 30+ years. Do we need more proof than Trump's election that the comfortable liberal set hasn't a goat's notion of the pain of much of the rest of the country? Frankly, I think Libs hadn't an inkling till Hillary bit the dust. Now they are reeling.

I presume that since the demise of the unions doesn't affect university salaries *yet*, means it just isn't a factor in Zmolek's reckoning. Neither is social disorganization, not even alluded to -- the criminality, drug use, and homelessness that desperate people descend to when the economic rug is yanked out from under them, immigrants and natives alike.

Only an opportunist like Donald Trump would say that immigrants are rapists and criminals. We know

that NAFTA threw millions of Mexicans out of farm work, and many risked their lives to come here. They are simply desperate people. Since Hillary Clinton couldn't get around to admitting the desperate class exists, many went for Donald Trump, though most of them don't see much to admire in him either.

The Dems abandoned ordinary folks long before Hillary, though. Much as I admired Barack Obama's restrained, elegant, intellectual mien, he bailed out Wall Street and left a lot of private homeowners to twist in the wind. We are not too stupid to remember that Bill Clinton set the whole schmazola in motion with gutting Glass-Steagall.

Hardly criminal, the Mexican lady running the tienda here in town is hard-working and hyper-honest, refusing to let me pay her for Spanish lessons since she is not a "trained" teacher. She prefers that I come and buy cerveza and tortillas. I do, but I often see people sending money, and that factor wasn't mentioned either, and I can't say if it is going to Mexico or Chicago to part of the family there, as poor immigrant families are, like my own, famous for supporting the weaker members. Another reason the government loves them -- they tend not to go on welfare.

Rather than spend the money to educate and train our own people, the U.S. government has let our schools languish into laxity, so businesses and universities hire highly educated individuals from abroad, claiming they aren't available here (no kidding, and who's responsible for that?). Education is expensive business and it is far easier to have foreign governments do it. Incidentally, non-English speaking immigrants cost plenty, especially ESL, and both ill treatment and low salaries have reduced candidates in teacher training

programs not only here in Iowa, but across the U.S.

I spent the year 1986 in Israel. At one point I took a bus to Egypt and stood around on the banks of the Nile, wondering what that country was going to do with the dozens of little kids toddling around behind veiled ladies doing their laundry in the river. How, an Iowa girl had to wonder, can they even feed them in this sand pile? Well, now we know -- it's called ISIS. Furthermore, the unsustainable birth-rate in traditional religions has to do with desire for adherents, and since the biz community loves a dozen folks applying for every job and paying the "prevailing" wage, it's hand-in-glove collusion.

When I was in college, my profs talked about the *Population Bomb* -- even though it was a Catholic college, and the logical extension of the ideas in that book had some serious implications for Catholic birth control policies. If university profs want to do their country or the world any favors (the implications for the environment here are profound), instead of defending immigration they need to come up with concrete proposals to reduce birth rates in every country. Ideas like cutting development funds to any state that has a birth rate above population maintenance, and incentives for those below it. International naming and shaming of countries that allow their religious elements to form public policies.

I can't help but feel Zmolek's immigration piece falls into the "lies, damn lies, and stats" category that Mark Twain so humorously delineated. Another barrage from the liberal press that has me feeling like a French goose being prepped for a fois gras future. ✂

--S.Keyron McDermott lives in Cascade

Democrats and the CIA

In a recent interview Noam Chomsky observed that “most of the world is just collapsing in laughter” over claims that Russia interfered in the American presidential election in any significant way. Chomsky usually gets things right, but in this case he has got it wrong. A consensus is developing in Europe and America that the Russians “hacked” the election.

The election story (which has never been validated with any evidence other than hearsay from the CIA) is part of a larger campaign of war fever directed against Russia. It is clear now that Hillary Clinton, the CIA, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* were locked and loaded, ready to engage in a new global struggle against a resurgent (would-be) superpower. Utterly shocked at Trump’s win, the military and foreign policy establishment have turned their guns on the seriously off-message president, treating his attempts to make deals with Putin instead of building up a military presence on Russia’s border as evidence of his unfitness to be president. Words like “treason” have even been used to describe innocuous discussions between Trump supporters and various Russians.

The “hacked” election story also serves as a Democratic Party cover-up for the real reason Trump is in the White House. As Bernie Sanders has said repeatedly, to the deaf ears of Democratic elected officials, Trump did not win the election. Democrats lost it because of their failure to deal with the Great Recession of 2008. Democratic Party policies produced a cyclical recovery

characterized by widespread job insecurity, health care insecurity, and low wages. Democrats essentially threw the working class overboard, and then sneered at them as they were treading water, exhorting the deplorable racists to be grateful for what the party had done for them.

What is even more sinister about the Democratic consensus on the need for a global confrontation with Russia is the absence of any counterweight in the party to unlimited American global expansionism. There appears to be a kind of historical amnesia about the reasons for Russia’s concern for security along its borders with western and central Europe. Russia has been invaded, disastrously, twice in the last two centuries by European militarist powers. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, NATO (i.e. US) forces have been engaged in an aggressive buildup in Eastern Europe, with missiles in Poland pointing at the Kremlin, and US tanks in the Baltic Republics. Building up troops along a country’s border is almost always considered an act of aggression, and sometimes an act of war.

It was the prospect of American troops actually in the Crimea, following the U.S. supported coup in the Ukraine, that led to Russia’s Crimean annexation. Putin could no more allow NATO troops in the Crimea than John F. Kennedy could allow Russian missiles in Cuba. Democratic warmongers, and their Republican allies like Senator McCain and Graham, insist on treating the annexation as analogous to the German invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1939, a prelude to a Russian

invasion of all of Eastern Europe.

Equally sinister is the Democratic Party leadership’s faith in the CIA. In the presidential debates Clinton publicly rebuked Trump for not having perfect faith in the (secret) conclusions of our national security agencies, as if these spy agencies were trustworthy professional organizations, like the American Medical Association.

The pronouncements of General James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence under the Obama administration and a Clinton ally, have been treated by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* as if he were the President of the local Rotary Club rather than a perjurer who lied under oath to Congress about NSA spying on Americans.

Have Democratic leaders forgotten the history of the CIA? It was created to interfere in foreign elections, beginning with the Italian elections of 1948. Since then it has evolved into a global terrorist organization that interferes in elections by assassinating heads of state, organizing coups (e.g. Iran, Guatemala, Argentina, and Chile), facilitating death squads directed at the followers of unsatisfactory political leaders, and funding America-friendly political parties, newspapers, and media. The CIA also builds secret prisons where prisoners are routinely (still) tortured.

This anti-Russian, pro-CIA consensus among Democratic officials goes deeper than short term opposition to an off-message president, who will no doubt be brought into line soon enough and become a sworn

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Looking Back and Looking Forward

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While some Dems sat on their hands last November, fretting over liberal purity, the Koch brothers' financial network was busy doing what Dems need to do. Koch et al invested millions into building grass roots organizations. We will never know how much because much of that "dark money" can't be traced. We need to build and organize from school boards, city halls, county courthouses, and Des Moines. I am excited to see both new people and veterans energized. We have to keep building. 2018 is just around the corner! ✨

—Bob Rush is a former State Senator
from Linn County

Democrats and the CIA

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adversary of Putin. Trump is already pushing for a massive increase in defense spending, presumably to be used on the Russian border as well as against ISIS. When that happens, we will have a full-scale bipartisan consensus behind a dangerous new global power struggle with Russia.

There was a time when prominent Democratic Senators took the lead in opposing American interventionism and exposing the global crimes of the CIA. Where are Frank Church and George McGovern and Iowa's own Dick Clark when we need them? ✨

—Jeff Cox

Labor and Civil Rights Struggles in Iowa's Present, Past, and Future

March 25, 9:30-3:30

2520 University Capitol Centre
(Old Capitol Mall), Iowa City

Free and open to the public.

Register for lunch: 319-335-4144.

Beyond Borders: Undocumented Mexican Americans

April 24, 7 PM

New Strand Theatre, West Liberty

Free and open to the public.

More info: 319-331-0713

Kaufmann Watch

Bobby Kaufmann, Iowa House District 73, consistently presents himself as a moderate Republican. "Just the fact that I have a great relationship with all the Democrats in the Johnson County delegation, I think that has been by far my biggest accomplishment." (Iowa City Press Citizen, 5/12/16).

Here are four bills Rep. Kaufmann recently voted for in the current legislative session:

- HF 517, adding 'stand your ground' to Iowa's gun laws
- HF 291, gutting Iowa workers' collective bargaining rights
- HF 516, protecting Iowa from non-existent voter fraud
- SF 166, allocating inadequate state aid to public schools

Two Democrats voted for the first one; no Democrats voted for the other three.

I want to establish White History Week. I'm not joking. One of the things that most afflicts this country is that white people don't know who they are or where they come from. And that's why you think I'm a problem. But I am not the problem, your history is. And as long as you pretend that you don't know your history, you are going to be a prisoner of it. And there is no question of you liberating me, because you can't liberate yourselves. We are in this together.

—James Baldwin, 1986

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Twenty-eight men
[Republican state senators]
who have never had to get
undressed, put on a gown and
put their feet in stirrups for a
Pap smear, are telling women
what's best for them.

–Sen. Janet Petersen
(D-Des Moines), 2/1/17

Culture and demographics
are our destiny. We can't
restore our civilization with
somebody else's babies.

–US Congressman Steve King
(R-IA), 3/12/17

Heroes are not giant
statues framed against a
red sky. They are people who
say: This is my community,
and it is my responsibility to
make it better.

–Studs Terkel



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