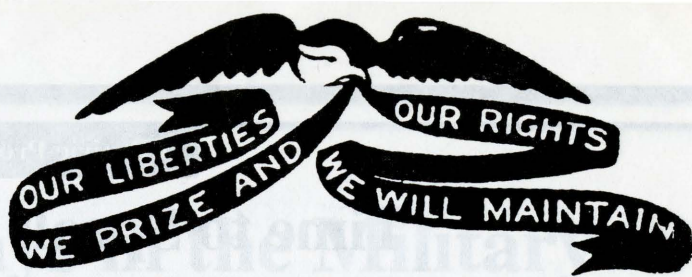


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Fall 1992

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Forgiven and Unforgiven in West Branch

It was a lot more fun in 1969.

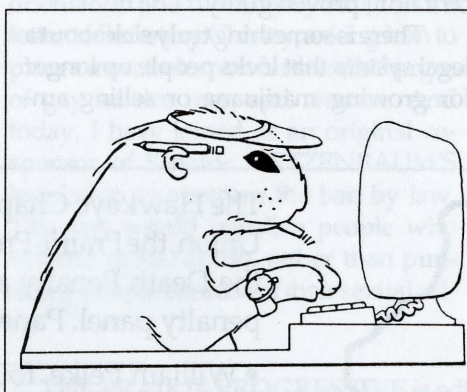
But, then again, many things were a lot more fun in '69, even traveling to West Branch to see a former president of the United States. Ronald Reagan's August 8 visit to the Herbert Hoover Library took me back 23 years, when Lyndon Baines Johnson made a similar trip to the Heartland (although we didn't call it that in those days).

I had been one of those who cheered with triumph when LBJ announced in March of '68 that he would not run for reelection. Watching his address to the nation on tv, it seemed to many of us that our being jeered and pelted with eggs and rocks during countless demonstrations and marches had finally paid off. Johnson was acknowledging that our protests—and Eugene McCarthy's 42% in the New Hampshire primary—had, in effect, scared a sitting president out of politics.

The war in Vietnam continued, but by the spring of 1969, LBJ was out of the headlines and back at the ranch. There wasn't a lot of fanfare for his visit to West Branch. Although this would be a rare public appearance for LBJ, the Hoover hype-machine hadn't yet cranked up to its current output of daily press releases (New Acquisition for Museum!... Washington Bureaucrat to Speak!... Hooverball Star Injured!). LBJ, it was said, was visiting West Branch simply to get some ideas for his own presidential library.

Some friends and I drove out in an old blue-green Rambler to see the man who had been our symbol of American brutality and governmental arrogance. A glimpse of the Devil—from a safe distance—would be good for the soul.

Leisurely approaching the outskirts of West Branch, we were unprepared for the sudden appearance of dozens of Highway Patrol cars—an unnerving reminder that even a deposed Devil had a lot of power.



Prairie Dog is on assignment.

The show of state force quieted our laughter, but we parked and walked the final quarter-mile with a kind of grim satisfaction. Yes, our humble efforts had contributed to the humbling of this notorious warmonger.

When he stepped out of the limo and waved his Stetson at the crowd, Johnson looked exactly like what he was: a wealthy, tanned, relaxed ex-superstar

who no longer had to listen to chants and catcalls wherever he went (Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?).

We stood and gawked at this cheerful man who had perfected the art of stealing and buying elections. A man whose only ideology was the accumulation of power. A man who would stab any back and kiss any ass to solidify that power. A man whose pride, ego, and misguided stubbornness caused irrevocable damage to America.

This is what I was thinking as the Hill Country Texan glad-handed and back-slapped the eager Iowans who pressed toward him. And yet, on that cloudy day in Cedar County, I felt the hate drain out of me. Here was LBJ himself, smiling and benign, gracing us with his charm, honoring us with his presence in our state. The sudden surge of benevolence and forgiveness surprised me as I, too, pressed toward him.

No such benevolence and forgiveness hit me as Ronald Reagan gave his homage to Hoover. His contribution to the ruination of America had been far more reckless and cruel than Johnson's. And here he was, gazing fondly at the flag-carrying boy and girl scouts who marched before us in their starched khaki uniforms.

It was a wonderful only-in-America sight: the hero of Free Enterprise matched with the puffed-up economic developers of West Branch. The little town has marketed its former president as shamelessly

Continued on Page 6

Time to Speak Out Against the Drug Reign of Terror in Cedar Rapids

Years of silence in the face of drug hysteria are now producing horrible results in Federal District Court in Cedar Rapids. Last December a twenty-five year old Center Point man was given 15 years, eight months, for growing marijuana. In January of 1992 a 41 year old LaPorte City man was given 24 years, four months without parole for cocaine dealing, and a 21 year old Waterloo man given 17 1/2 years without parole for selling crack cocaine. His plea for a shorter sentence on the grounds that he cooperated with officers on entrapping another cocaine dealer, that he was very young when he sold only a small amount, and that he wouldn't know his children when he got out of prison was rejected by Judge David Hansen, who responded that crack was "...the scourge of the nation" (Waterloo Courier, 29 January 1992).

One day later Judge Hansen sentenced a 24 year old Waterloo man given 9 years, two months, without parole for selling crack cocaine, and said that "...if it had not been for the substantial assistance provided to the government, he

would have sentenced (him) to 16 years and eight months in prison" (Waterloo Courier, 30 January 1992). So much for lack of judicial discretion. In the most brutal sentence of all, a 39 year old northern Iowa man was sentenced in July to life without parole for selling amphetamines (Prosecutor, Richard Murphy; Judge, Robert Renner.)

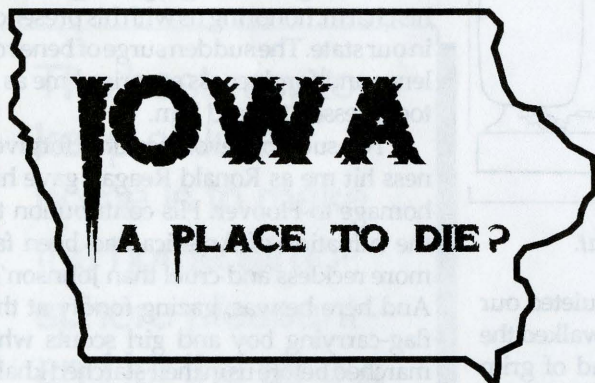
In August, in Federal District Court in Des Moines, a Johnson County man was given ten years without parole for growing marijuana. Long before he was convicted, his property had been confiscated under federal drug forfeiture laws, and the money distributed to the Johnson County Inter-agency Drug Task Force (Iowa City Press-Citizen, 22 April 1992). Johnson County Sheriff Bob Carpenter claimed that "This is the largest amount my agency has received since the task force started," (Daily Iowan, 22 April 1992). So much for the principle of innocent until proven guilty.

There is something truly sick about a legal system that locks people up longer for growing marijuana or selling am-

phetamines than for torturing a child or committing second degree murder. It is time to break the silence about the war on drugs, and speak out publicly in protest. Our elected officials, judges, and prosecutors should hear from all of us on this subject. We need to constantly press our senators and congresspersons to eliminate the federal mandatory minimum sentences for drug cases.

Finally, we need to support the families of these victims of the war on drugs. To do that, you may contact Families Against Mandatory Minimums, a grassroots group of families of prisoners, mostly in the federal system, who have come together to challenge the mandatory minimum sentences that judges are required to hand down in drug cases. I

Families Against Mandatory Minimums meetings are the last Sunday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at Hope Lutheran Church, 2736 Bowling St., NW, Cedar Rapids. To contact the group directly, write Linda Jones, 134 Miller Ave. SW, Cedar Rapids, IA 52404.



7:30 PM

Monday, October 5

Iowa City Public Library, Rm A

The Hawkeye Chapter of the Iowa Civil Liberties Union, the Prairie Progressive, and Iowans Against the Death Penalty are sponsoring an anti-death-penalty panel. Panel members include:

- William Pelke, founder of Murder Victim Families for Reconciliation and the death-penalty issues coordinator for the Indiana Chapter of Amnesty International;
- David Baldus, University of Iowa law professor and author of Equal Justice and the Death Penalty;
- Minnette Doderer, 45th District State Representative.

Call 319-351-2973 for more information.

The America of Country Music Biographies

Is country music thriving or disappearing? "Downhome" or mainstream? All-American or strictly Southern? It is all of these things, for its history has been shaped by tension and tugs-of-war between such polar opposites. Sociology identifies country music with the rural, Southern, White, Protestant working-class. A good case can be made that the music still belongs to this slice of the populace, and a good counter-case can be made that it now belongs to America in general. Certain is the fact that country music has become big business. Country fans shell out impressive sums on CDs and concert tickets, souvenir t-shirts, belt buckles, key chains, and my favorite spin-off industry, biographies and autobiographies of the stars.

Cynics might well wonder about the truth of the slick, photo-packed life stories, but since entertainers' lives are subject to the scrutiny of the same relentless journalists who dog our politicians, it seems that the public versions of well-known entertainers' lives must be generally factual. Yet, there is no doubt that these lives have been selectively presented and packaged to conform to the fans' values and vision.

The country biographies are versions of the basic American myth, the "rags to riches" story, success stories about folks who have skyrocketed from lowly beginnings to glorious success. However, readers of these success stories expect more than the thrill of an upward climb—namely, confirmation that their singing idols came from and are still part of the fans' own community. It can be argued, in fact, that the biographies' main function is to provide evidence of a star's humble origins and allegiance to them. Such evidence may involve biographical details and appropriate humble statements, often combined with a portrayal of show business success as distinctly negative: a dreary life of hard work and grinding travel amid the corrupting, alienating influences of show business that the stars must endure for the sake of

the fans. Some, like Roy Acuff, even present wealth as a cross to be borne. In his charmingly contradictory autobiography, Roy Acuff's Nashville, Acuff longs for the old days when country entertainers enjoyed themselves without worry about bank accounts, insurance or property, adding, "It's not that way today, I'll tell you. Now there's too much money; so much, in fact, that almost nobody seems to be happy."

Many country stars express their belief in the dignity and value of hard physical work, especially hard "country" work in the fields. Johnny Cash writes in Man in Black: "Daddy taught us many things, but a most important less was that hard work is good for you . . . We soon learned that it was not only our obligation, but our privilege to help make the cotton crop." Similarly, Mel Tillis writes in Stutterin' Boy: "I recommend some field labor for children. I think it helped make me a better person today." Tammy Wynette also expresses pride in her years of picking cotton.

Hank Williams, Jr., born to the wealth of his legendary father, strives to demonstrate acceptable "common man" attitudes in Living Proof (*NY: Dell/Bryan, 1979), saying: "I'd like to say it had been a long, hard climb from humble beginnings, singing to cornstacks and broomsticks. Of course I'd be lying." Although he can't deny being rich, at least Williams can point out that he is not overly educated; indeed, his is one of a number of country biographies containing some ambivalence or hostility toward education. Williams notes that Bill Anderson came to Nashville with a college degree, and he "felt obliged to hide the fact. It was a definite hindrance."

Country music biographies reveal, too, that most country stars share a strongly religious background. In Hank Williams, William Koon comments: "Hank Williams is only one of hundreds of country singers who, as the emcees inevitably put it, 'got started singing in church' or 'first showed a unique talent

while signing Gospel songs in the choir.' It is a commonplace and almost obligatory apprenticeship for country music stardom." Country music stars are expected to have a fundamentalist Protestant upbringing and lifelong faith. According to their biographies, most do. However, a frequently recurring theme of the stars' life stories is that a "downhome" faith is likely to be sorely tested by temptations and obstacles on the "painful climb" to success. Johnny Cash and Jeannie C. Riley wrote autobiographies centering upon their spiritual struggles, and the biographies of Hank Williams, Sr., Jerry Lee Lewis, Bob Wills, Dolly Parton and George Jones also emphasize the conflict between religious values and their careers, sometimes symbolized by the competing hometown institutions, the church and the honky-tonk.

Many biographies of male stars refer to sexual inequalities or double standards, although the stars don't generally endorse these patterns. Notable, however, are strong statements for women's rights made by several women entertainers, including Loretta Lynn and Tammy Wynette. In her book Stand by Your Man, Wynette defends her hit song of the same name that seemed to advocate wifely submission and acceptance of infidelity. She says she is "emotionally dependent on men," but affirms her own "liberation" in terms of "financial independence, being the family breadwinner, raising children along, and running a business."

Country biographies are publicity devices, advertisements for songs, and escapist entertainment, but they are also documents of American culture that contain populist celebration of the "common" person and rural labor, and explore American issues such as religious conflict, changing sex roles, and ambivalence about education and success. ●

—By Pam Saur, a former Iowan now living in the Great State of Texas.

Unforgiven and Forgotten: Bullets and Baseball Fill the Summertime Screen

This summer Hollywood gave us box-office hits about two of America's favorite pastimes: baseball and gunslinging.

There are a number of surprising similarities between *A League of Their Own* and *Unforgiven*. In each movie a central character leaves home on a personal quest, Dottie Hinson (Geena Davis) in *League* and Will Munny (Clint Eastwood) in *Unforgiven*. And each does it for a family member, Geena for her kid sister, who is wasting away on the family dairy farm, and Clint for his kids, who are facing starvation as swine fever spreads through his herd. Both characters join a team, face the ultimate challenge in their respective fields, and prove themselves to be the best. Each then returns home to mundane domestic challenges.

But it's how these films differ that throws light on some basic differences between men's and women's movies. *Unforgiven* seeks to revise the history of gunfighters in the Old West, while *League* is trying to rescue the herstory of the long forgotten women's baseball league that was founded when World War II threatened to shut down the men's leagues. So Geena joins a baseball team, and Clint hooks up with a team of bounty hunters. She catches cowhide and he pumps lead. She is too modest to recognize how good she is, and he was too drunk to remember how bad he once was. She loses, he wins. But she doesn't care, because she'd rather be home with her husband anyway. If he loses, he dies. In *League* the only blood comes from sliding into base in short skirts, and the only death occurs off screen. *Unforgiven* has plenty of both.

Another major difference is in the acting. Geena Davis creates a multi-layered character with a range of emotions running from doe-eyed compassion to steely-eyed competitiveness. Clint's range is pretty much with or without the hat. For him acting has always been as

easy as falling off a horse, which he does three times.

Favorable response to these two movies runs mostly along gender lines. (Men seem to prefer baseball movies in which the players are born with bats and balls.) While *League* is enjoying much popular support, *Unforgiven* is reaping all the critical acclaim. A good deal of mythology is building up around a movie that claims to demythologize the Western by portraying a sobered-up gunfighter who gave up his wicked ways for the love of a now deceased woman.

"Try thinking of Will Munny as the kinder, gentler America, just waiting for word of evil to come over the horizon."

The biggest myth is that Eastwood is atoning for all the violence of his earlier movies. A sampling from his forgiving critics: "complicates and criticizes his earlier work," "reveals his disgust for the false mythology of the Western hero," "a violent movie that seeks to demythologize killing," "a genuine compulsion to de-romanticize Western gunfighting."

All this is hogwash, yes, that same stuff we first see Eastwood diving into to prove he's a changed man. But who doubted for a moment that he would in due time take a swig and be back in the saddle depopulating the planet? (The movie's message is that liquor, not testosterone, is the number one cause of violence.) This is Clint Eastwood, after all. Our movie experience and box-office expectations demand that he be himself and do his thing. (Michael Jordan lik-

ened the Dream Team to "12 Clint Eastwoods hired to come over and do a job"). Try to deny that you felt you finally got your Munny's worth as the townspeople stood in slack-jawed awe watching Clint ride off on his white horse.

The movie's fans are calling him an anti-hero, but this man who says "I killed about everything that walked and crawled at one time or another" ends up looking a lot like your standard Western hero. He's really neither, though. Will Munny is the new, post-Nam hero.

The Western has always been the quintessential American movie, the window to the American soul. In it, we watched the descendants of the Puritans strap on the six-shooters and gun down evil from sea to shining sea. But after Vietnam, America can never play the cowboy in the white hat again. Those who mythologize *Unforgiven* and see its evil protagonist as Eastwood's self-criticism miss the larger picture. Try thinking of Will Munny as the kinder, gentler America, just waiting for word of evil to come over the horizon. Simply substitute oil for whiskey as the lubricant that trips the trigger and you have Baghdad instead of Big Whiskey, Wyoming—America atoning in the Persian Gulf for the sins of Vietnam.

Unforgiven shows early promise when the focus is on the women plotting their revenge against two violent males, but then, so predictably, the cowboys take over. It could be argued that *League* also is too much of a gender stereotype. There is little anger that the women are forced back into the kitchen when the men come home from the war. Maybe someday we'll get a movie about a woman who would gladly trade her husband for a chance to play ball. Or a movie about the Black cowboy who couldn't kill anymore. Or, better yet, one about the woman who tamed the Jaws of the West and turned him into a hog farmer. ●

—By Jae Retz

Tom Harkin on Gays in the Military

Mr. HARKIN: Mr. President, I rise today to speak about two groups of military officers.

The members of one group are accused of gross sexual impropriety.

One member of the other group was ranked consistently as one of the best Navy bombardier/navigators.

One group forced unsuspecting women—some of them fellow Navy officers—to run a gauntlet of lurid comments and fondling.

One of the other group had his picture hung under a sign that read "Top Gun," and has never been accused of behavior unbecoming an officer or of any impropriety.

One group is characterized by silence. No members of the first group—not one—has acknowledged who he is. This unwillingness to face the disciplinary action that is so clearly warranted is an unfortunate indication that these officers are not the kinds we need in the U.S. Armed Forces. We do not need officers who degrade and abuse woman. We do not need officers who do not behave themselves as gentlemen. And we sure do not need cowards who will not face the must.

One member of the other group is Lt. JAG. Tracy Thorne, who bravely came forward and acknowledged that he was not in compliance with Defense Department regulations—not because of anything he did, but because of who he is. Lieutenant Thorne is gay. And Lieutenant Thorne's exemplary record and ability make him exactly the kind of officer we need in the U.S. Armed Forces.

So guess which group is being thrown out of the Navy?

Mr. President, I proudly served as a Navy pilot. The day I won my wings is one of the proudest of my life. And I am proud to have served my country for 8 years, 8 months, and 8 days as a Navy pilot. But I am ashamed that the U.S.

Navy has officers in the first group—those officers who participated in the activities in Las Vegas—and that it discharges officers like Lieutenant Thorne because of an outdated policy based on stereotype and prejudice.

Let me emphasize that I am not tarring all officers with the same brush. Most military officers have never engaged in the type of drunken assault on women that happened in the Las Vegas Hilton last September. However, I am concerned with the attitude that boys will be boys, and that the Tailhook incident may be a symptom of a much deeper problem within our Armed Forces.

Because I disagreed with the administration's policy on gay men and lesbians in the Armed Services, I cosponsored Senator ADAMS' legislation calling on the President to overturn the ban. When I saw Lieutenant Thorne's appearance on "Nightline," discussing his sexual orientation and the military ban, I sent a letter to Secretary Cheney, asking him to place a moratorium on further discharges of gay service men and women. And today, I have joined as an original cosponsor of Senator METZENBAUM'S legislation to overturn the ban by law. This law would penalize people who commit sexual abuse, rather than punishing people because of their sexual ori-

entation. Under this law, we would crack down on the men in the first group, and stop expelling people in the second.

All of these efforts would be unnecessary if another former Navy pilot would recognize the unfairness of this outdated policy. That person is President George Bush. The President could overturn the ban with a stroke of this pen. Unfortunately, he is not willing to lead on this issue, as is the case on so many issues. His emphasis on family values, so called, has blinded him to the values of fairness, of decency, and of justice to Tracy Thorne, and to some 1,500 officers and enlisted personnel discharged each year for being gay. As it was when he opposed passage of the civil rights act last year, George Bush is not willing to step forward as a leader in favor of a change toward inclusion and fair treatment.

I know full well that neither of the bills I have cosponsored or the letter I sent to the Secretary of Defense will make any difference unless the President is willing to stand up for what is right—to come forward and forthrightly declare his support for fair treatment and inclusion for gay men and lesbians in our Armed Forces.

So I would ask the President of the United States: Is it not time to take a stand for a change? ●

—Senate Proceedings, 7/28/92

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE is edited by members of the Iowa City Local of The Democratic Socialists of America.

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Forgiven and Unforgiven,
continued from page 1

as Dyersville has packaged and sold its Field of Dreams. Who better than Reagan—the premiere huckster and pitchman for the American Dream—to help sell the re-invented image of a failed president? Who better than Reagan—a man who will shill for anyone, from General Electric to the Japanese government, if the price is right—to give a homey speech written for him by the captains of the Hoover industry? The Music Man had come to River City.

Reagan presided over the U.S. as it became a debtor nation. He abetted the victimization of thousands of Nicaraguans and Salvadorans. He allowed hundreds of thousands of Americans to become homeless. While the percentage of children living in poverty rose to one in five, Reagan was consulting an astrologist. Yet there he stood—the Teflon

President—unscarred by the havoc he had wreaked, never having experienced the vilification that LBJ suffered for his sins. He was no more conscious of the pain caused by his administration than he was of the sweat-drenched, near-fainting children who held their flags in the sun until a Hoover official whisked them into the air-conditioned library.

This day in West Branch, the hate did not drain out of me. LBJ paid a price for his hubris and intransigence. Reagan never has. He is truly unforgiven. ●

—by David Leshtz,
an Iowa City Democrat

Conceit, arrogance,
and egotism are
the essentials
of patriotism.

—Emma Goldman

State Senate Election Alert!

Targeted by Republican leadership in 1988 because of her progressive stands, Bev Hannon fought hard and won. Redistricted, she now faces a powerful incumbent backed by the Religious Far Right. Please donate generously to: Hannon for Senate, c/o Prairie Progressive, 112 S. Dodge, Iowa City, IA 52240.

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The best way to
keep children
home is to make
the home atmo-
sphere pleasant—
and let the air out
of the tires.

—Dorothy Parker
on family values