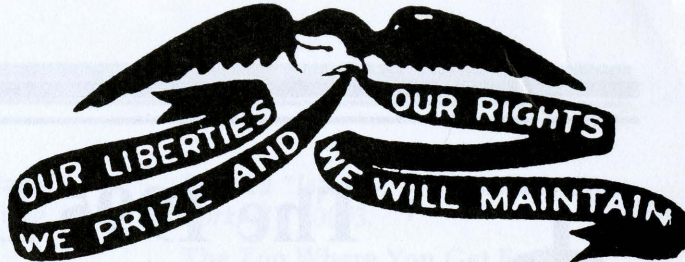


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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Summer 1995

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Chipping At The Edges: Prairie Dog's Summer Reading List

"...the disparity between what the United States thinks it is and what it actually is is now too great to be reconciled. One can only chip away at the edges."

— Gore Vidal, *The Nation*, June 12, 1995

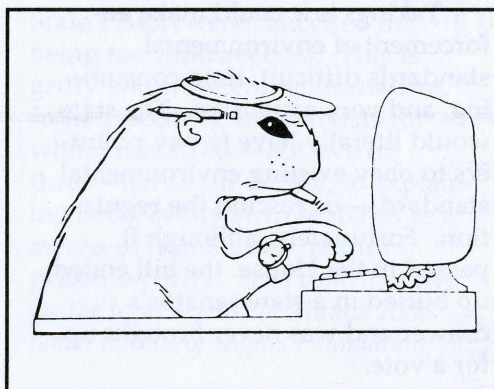
The Snarling Citizen by Barbara Ehrenreich. The author of *The Worst Years of Our Lives* cheerfully assures us that things haven't gotten any better.

The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven by Sherman Alexie. Fabulous short stories about life on the reservation, including the classic "Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at Woodstock."

Fleet Walker's Divided Heart by David Zang. Major league baseball's first black player was also an inventor, a civil rights activist, a writer, and a businessman. A vivid journey through the labyrinth of race relations in America.

Sacred Country by Rose Tremain. A five-year old English girl decides she's a boy, and enlists an assortment of zany Brits to help her prove it.

The Agribusiness Examiner edited by the awesome A.V. Krebs. Everything a prairie progressive needs to know about government subsidies to corporate giants like Cargill and Sunkist, why so many small farms



have become dependent on commodity credit loans, and how Farm Bureau rhetoric provides cover for ultranationalist and racist vigilante groups. Send \$25 for a one-year sub to *PrairieFire*, 550 11th St., Des Moines, IA 5030.

Coin Locker Babies by Ryn Murakami. A cross between cyberpunk fiction and a Japanese comic strip. Between the laughs, this cutting-edge novel will chill you on the steamiest Iowa night.

The Age of McCarthyism by Ellen Schrecker. This collection of oral

histories, minutes from loyalty board hearings, and trial testimonies proves conclusively that the witch hunts of the fifties were a calculated, well-orchestrated crusade, with the shadow of J. Edgar Hoover always lurking nearby. Must reading if you still think the Red Scare was just a bit of temporary hysteria produced by one alcoholic Senator from Wisconsin.

Black Fire: The Making of an American Revolutionary by Nelson Peery. Imagine the horror of an African-American soldier being told during World War II that his efforts would help preserve the American way of life—a life of poverty, police brutality, and lynchings. Peery's account of organizing to fight racism in the military burns with the desire for justice.

The Good Negress by A.J. Verdelle. An African-American teen shleps back and forth between Detroit and Virginia during the sixties. American realism at its finest.

Deeper Shades of Green: The Rise of Blue-Collar and Minority Environmentalism in America by Jim Schwab. A former Iowa Citian portrays the growing power of grassroots activism in communities threatened by toxic hazards.

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The 1995 Legislative Session: Not Very 'Green' Unless You Count the Paychecks of Industry Lobbyists



The Iowa legislative session ended in early May—and none too soon as far as the environment is concerned. Every-day seemed to lead us closer to more absurd anti-environmental suggestions. The good news is that most of these proposals failed, thanks to a strong “tag-team” coalition effort of citizen groups acting together to protect our environmental heritage.

Factory Farming...What a Nuisance!

The debate about intensive livestock operations raged throughout the entire session. The centerpiece legislation on livestock reform was written by agribusiness representatives, and was a weak attempt to pacify outraged rural residents, farmers, smaller producers, and environmentalists.

However, with this bill came “nuisance” protection. The nuisance section relates to lawsuits against operators whose activities adversely affect neighboring farmers, rural residents, or others. The law now requires that people filing suit against operators meet higher standards of proof; if they lose the case, they may be required to pay all court costs and fees.

This is bad news for many citizens who live next to livestock confinements that smell so awful they can't hang their laundry out to dry—or for a century-farm family who has a huge livestock operation

placed next to them, making their property virtually unmarketable.

Don't Get Taken by Takings

The “takings” issue was back in full force at the capitol for the third year in a row. On the surface it can look appealing—but you don't have to look too deep to find some questionable impact of the bills.

Takings law could make enforcement of environmental standards difficult, time-consuming, and very expensive. The state would literally have to pay polluters to obey existing environmental standards—or rescind the regulation. Fortunately, although it passed in the House, the bill ended up buried in a state senator's drawer and was never brought up for a vote.

“It throws citizens' rights to know about polluters in their neighborhoods right out the window...”

The Polluter's Rights Bill

Actually known as the environmental audit bill, this is another

really bad idea that came out of the state House this year but never came up for a vote in the Senate.

Polluters who voluntarily tell state officials that they are breaking an environmental law would be let off the hook—and protected from public disclosure of their violations. It throws citizens' rights to know about polluters in their neighborhoods right out the window, along with any penalties they might have incurred.

Maybe we should make this law apply to all crimes:

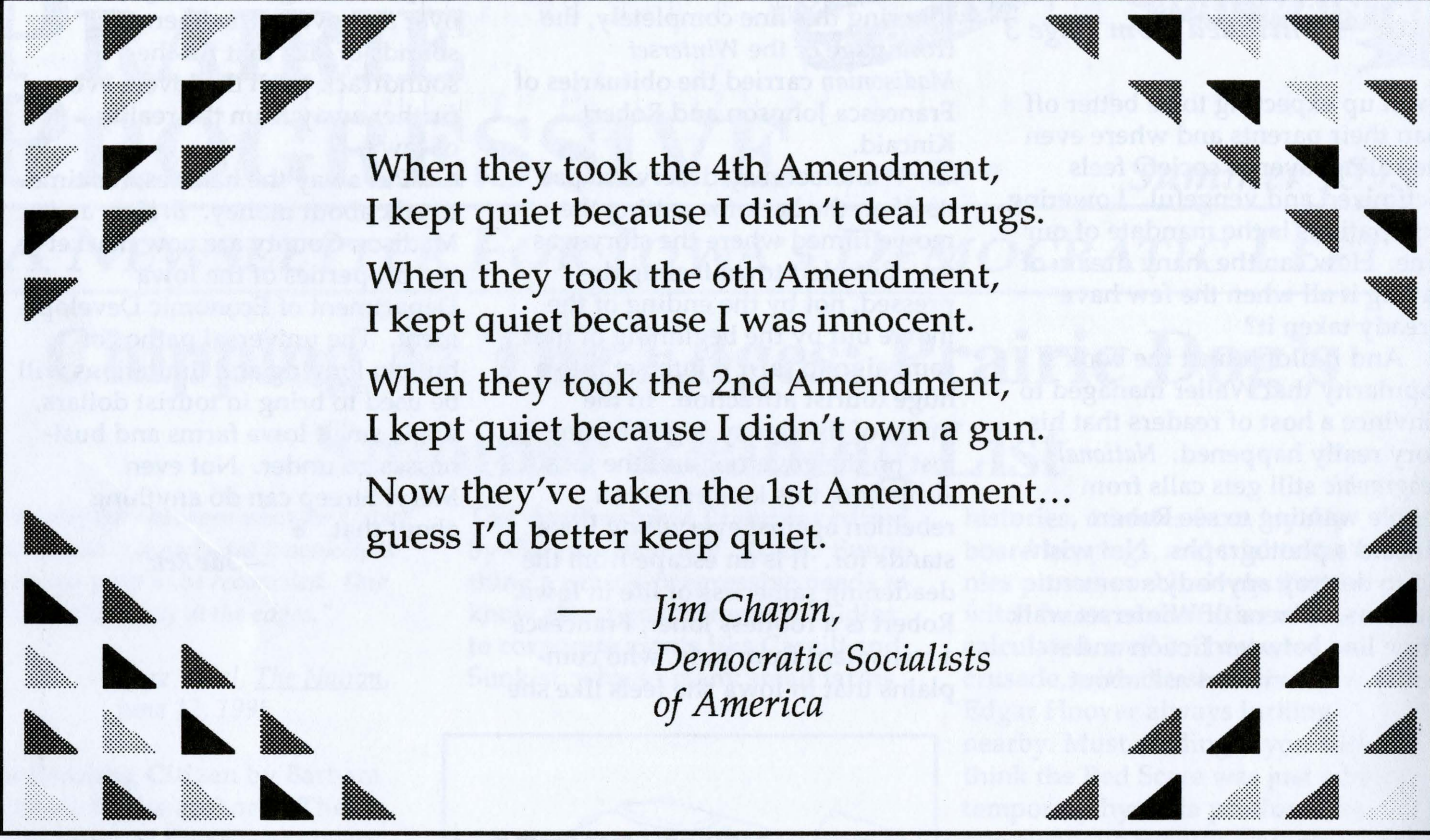
“Hello, police? I just robbed a bank and drove my car through a window, and wanted you to know.”

“Don't worry about it, we won't press charges, and it will be our little secret. Thanks for calling!”

Utility Companies are Concerned about Your Bills...Really

Iowa utilities joined forces this year, claiming—on behalf of rate-payers—that they must dismantle Iowa's renewable energy program. Utilities argued that “social welfare” programs, such as renewable energy incentives, tie their hands

Green, continued on Page 3



When they took the 4th Amendment,
I kept quiet because I didn't deal drugs.

When they took the 6th Amendment,
I kept quiet because I was innocent.

When they took the 2nd Amendment,
I kept quiet because I didn't own a gun.

Now they've taken the 1st Amendment...
guess I'd better keep quiet.

— *Jim Chapin,
Democratic Socialists
of America*

Green,

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and cause rate increases for their customers.

Utilities even bought huge newspaper ads claiming to be in favor of lower rates. Ever heard of the fox guarding the chicken coop? Luckily, the utilities' propaganda campaign failed, and Iowa's renewable energy programs remain intact. Now the utilities are saying that energy efficiency programs are "social welfare" programs that they should be responsible for.

Next time you pay your energy bill, consider adding a note in support of renewable energy and efficiency programs—and ask them where the money comes from to pay for all of their lobbyists!

Yes, There Are Some Good State Legislators

Although not very green, the outcomes of the session could have

been much worse. Some important funding for environmental programs was renewed, new funds for leaking underground storage tanks were allocated, and some significant issues were raised—thanks in part to the Johnson County delegation.

What's happening at the capitol sometimes seems very remote, but the impact of bills like these are very local, and affect the quality of life for all of us. ♻️

— *Julianna Johnston is the
Environmental Director of
Iowa Citizen Action
Network*

Summer Milestones

July 11, 1955 "In God We Trust" put on all U.S. currency

July 14, 1965 Adlai Stevenson died

July 26, 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act signed into law

July 30, 1970 Wadena Rock Festival began in Fayette, Iowa

Aug. 6, 1945 U.S. bombed Hiroshima, Japan

Aug. 11, 1965 Watts riots

Francesca's Revenge: Streep Bridges Waller's Gender Gap

Armed with a home-made press pass for the Prairie Progressive, instead of an official one from *National Geographic*, and driving an old grey Ford called rusty, instead of an old green Chevy pickup named "Harry," I pulled into Winterset for the world premiere of *The Bridges of Madison County*. After the nearly three-hour drive from Iowa City, I was moving toward the town square more like a bear than a leopard. It was quite a sight to see so many wholesome family-first Iowans turn out for this joyful celebration of adultery.

You may find the above unintelligible. Even though a recent poll found that Iowans' favorite book—right after the Bible—is Robert Waller's *Bridges of Madison County*, it's a safe bet that most readers of this publication have read neither.

Waller's tale of the "leopard" Robert Kincaid renouncing his "temple virgin" Francesca Johnson tries to set gender equity back at least a century, adding an unwelcome dimension to Iowa's claim of world corn capitol. One great mixing of the novel's corn and sexism: during a lovemaking scene (we assume Robert is on top), Kincaid whispers into Francesca's ear fragments of a Rilke poem, lines to a Navajo sun chant, and his visions of dolphins moving along the coast of Africa, while she responds with "small, unintelligible sounds."

As more and more people the world over come to identify Iowa with Waller's novel, the new state slogan, "Iowa, You Make Me Smile," would better read: "Iowa—Don't Make Me Laugh." But

recently two events have helped ease the embarrassment of association: Waller's departure for taxless Texas and Clint Eastwood's movie version of the book.

The tiny old Iowa Theater, sitting kitty-cornered to the Madison County Chamber of Commerce building on the town square, had rolled out the red carpet for the occasion. Tuxedo-clad locals with white gloves stood ready to greet the "dignitaries" who would soon

"It was quite a sight to see so many wholesome family-first Iowans turn out for this joyful celebration of adultery."

emerge from the eagerly anticipated limousines. Though the Chamber would tell anybody who asked that THE ACTORS would not be there, rumors told us otherwise. So imagine our disappointment when out of the first limo steps the least charismatic person in all Iowa—the governor himself. Then into the theater to watch with this darling of the Religious Wrong a movie that makes Iowa in the world's mind more a place to have a legendary fling than a place to grow.

It took a Meryl Streep to turn a man's man's book into Francesca's movie. To director Eastwood's credit, he cast Streep (you don't

hire her for a secondary role) and made a quiet, self-effacing man out of Waller's jabberwocky-mystic. It's nice to see Eastwood shooting a camera instead of his trademark long-nosed revolver. Maybe he won't remain unforgiven for his substantial contribution to America's culture of violence.

In the movie it is Francesca who lets things happen and stops more from happening. She maneuvers the course from wife to lover and back again, and makes the hard choices in the eternal battle between private want and public don't.

Eastwood illuminates Francesca's dual roles of willing lover and faithful nurturer with two parallel images. Lying next to Kincaid she traces her hand inexorably down his bare chest toward the point where PG-13 turns into R, the base of Jesse Helm's political power. Later, lying in the same bed next to her dying husband, Francesca duplicates this clichéd gesture, sliding her hand down his chest, but then, movingly, takes his hand in hers. Streep will stay with you long after the lights come on.

How do we explain *Bridges'* shocking success? Human fantasy has always been easy prey for tragic love stories. But this one? Streep diplomatically admitted herself "blind to the power of the book," but a travel company in Japan offers tours that follow the path of Robert Kincaid from Bellingham, Washington to Winterset, Iowa.

Bridges' theme of renunciation found a ripe and ready audience in this country, where the young have

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**Reading List,
Continued from Page 1**

Solidarity and Survival by Shelton Stromquist. In the late eighties the Iowa Federation of Labor collected hundreds of oral histories of farmers, miners, construction and railroad workers. Stromquist incorporated the workers' own words into an inspiring history of the labor movement in Iowa. Give this to someone who thinks that the Hawkeye state has no tradition of labor struggles.

Tree of Heaven by Jim McKean. If Robert Frost had lived in Iowa City...

Floyd Dell: The Life and Times of an American Rebel by Douglas Clayton. As an editor of *The Masses* at the start of World War I, Dell was charged under the Espionage Act, leading to a circus-like trial not unlike that of the Chicago Eight 55 years later. Dell was a home-grown radical, born in Davenport, whose guiding values were "fun, truth, beauty, realism, freedom, peace, feminism, and revolution."

In the Electric Mist with Confederate Dead by James Lee Burke. Cajun detective searches for a sadistic killer in the bayous and

seedier parishes of Louisiana. Plenty of hurricanes, jasmine, gumbo, and delta angst.

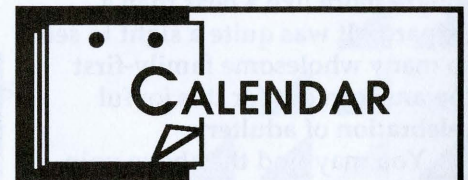
Elvis Presley Calls His Mother After the Ed Sullivan Show by Samuel Charters. Prairie Dog admits not having read this, but it's too good a title to leave out. Folk/blues historian Charters' novella is, according to the *LA Times*, "a single, unbroken monologue that wails and jangles like an electric guitar solo."

Live from Death Row by Mumia Abu-Jamal. Considered by many to be a genuine political prisoner, Abu-Jamal was questionably charged with murder after years of refusing to compromise his tough reporting on police brutality and racism in Philadelphia. Denounced by Bob Dole on the Senate floor, his NPR broadcasts from Huntington State Prison were cancelled for being too controversial. This is gritty and frightening journalism, from describing the convicts for whom one strike—not two or three—led to jail for life, to explaining body-cavity strip searches as a means of humiliation, not for prison security. *Send contributions for the legal defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal to: Bill of Rights Foundation*

(marked "Jamal"), 740 Broadway, New York, NY 10003.

The Zoo Where You Get Fed to God by Michael Ventura. A surgeon having a break with reality regains his sanity (well, some of it) by communing with tigers, giraffes, and a female vocalist in a punk band. Heavy on therapy, light on plot, but compelling for anyone who's ever, uh, heard voices. 🐾

— *Prairie Dog, with research assistance from Paul "Prairie Mouse" Ingram*



- July 8** Statewide Anti-Homophobia & "Fight the Right" organizing meeting, 1-5 pm, at the Unitarian Church in Cedar Falls. More info: 319-337-5879.
- July 27** Andre Codrescu reads at Shambaugh Auditorium, 8 pm, in Iowa City
- Aug. 24** Timothy Leary lectures at Iowa Memorial Union, 8 pm, in Iowa City
- Sept. 15** 9th Annual Prison Awareness Walk, sponsored by Criminal Justice Ministries, begins in Sioux City. More info: 515-284-5047.

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Francesca,
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given up expecting to be better off than their parents and where even the ruling layer of society feels victimized and vengeful. Lowering expectations is the mandate of our time. How can the many dream of having it all when the few have already taken it?

And it didn't hurt the book's popularity that Waller managed to convince a host of readers that his story really happened. *National Geographic* still gets calls from people wanting to see Robert Kincaid's photographs. Not wishing to destroy anybody's romantic illusions, citizens of Winterset walk a fine line between fiction and reality when visitors ask about

characters and events in the story. Ignoring this line completely, the front page of the *Winterset Madisonian* carried the obituaries of Francesca Johnson and Robert Kincaid.

Winterset may deserve to pat itself on the back for getting the movie filmed where the story was set. But I left town feeling depressed, not by the ending of the movie but by the beginning of the campaign to turn Winterset into a huge tourist attraction. In the midst of the frenzy, a great irony is lost on the governor and the locals. At its core this love story is a rebellion against everything Iowa stands for. It is an escape from the deadening sameness of life in Iowa. Robert is a rootless loner; Francesca a transplant from Italy, who complains that in Iowa she feels like she

keeps meeting the same person over and over. The liberating sounds of jazz that fill the soundtrack push the lovers even further away from the reality of Iowa.

Put away the hankies; it's time to talk about money. *Bridges* and Madison County are now marketing properties of the Iowa Department of Economic Development. The universal pathos of human longing and limitations will be used to bring in tourist dollars, while small Iowa farms and businesses go under. Not even Meryl Streep can do anything about that. ☹

—Jae Retz

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Inside!

"At its core this love story is a rebellion against everything Iowa stands for."

—Jae Retz reviews
"Bridges of Madison County"