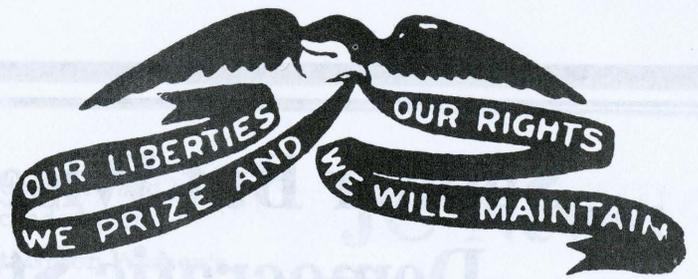


# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



® 22

Summer 1996

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

## Prairie Dog's 1996 Summer Reading List

**A**DARE officer gets busted in Des Moines for drugs, and is found to be wearing "a sexual device inserted in his body").

TV watchers are treated to 1-800-BETS OFF announcements sandwiched between ads for lotteries and riverboat gambling (Iowa now has nine floating casinos to go with its dog and horse tracks, plus three Mesquakie casinos unregulated by the state).

A political newcomer knocks off a longtime Johnson County Supervisor in a Democratic primary -- the first time in a quarter-century that county voters have rejected an incumbent supervisor.

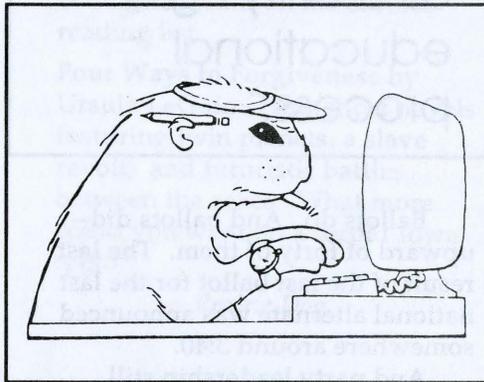
A pest control company sucks up prairie dogs in Texas with a vacuum truck and sells them for \$700 apiece to Japanese pet-lovers. Iowans remain shamefully silent.

All this, and 1996 is only half over. Time to mix a pitcher of margaritas (or iced decaf cappuccino, if you must), put on an Ella album, and lose yourself in one of Prairie Dog's recommended books, until you're ready to face the rest of the year. Stay strong, and watch out for the vacuum truck.

**The Intersection of Law and Désire** by J.W. Redmann. New Orleans-based lesbian private eye Micky Knight investigates a child pornography ring. Knight's own memories of childhood abuse cast

an authentic shadow over an incredibly dense plot and a colorful cast of bayou characters.

**Chronicles of Dissent** by Noam Chomsky. With an introduction by Alexander Cockburn. See page 6.



**At Eighty-Two** by May Sarton. The joys of solitude, the trials of aging, and the struggle of the creative process continued to be explored by Sarton with wisdom and clarity up to her death last year.

**Parting the Waters: America in the King Years** by Taylor Branch. A masterpiece of history, sociology, and storytelling. Read it before the author speaks at the University of Iowa next Martin Luther King Day.

**Moving Violations: War Zones, Wheelchairs, and Declarations of Independence** by John Hockenberry. The National Public Radio correspondent explains why northern Iraq is more hospitable to wheelchair users than downtown New York, how it felt to be an

American at Khomeini's funeral in Iran, and why peroxide is his most important travel item.

**Tailspin: Women at War in the Wake of Tailhook** by Jean Zimmerman. All the dirt on that party in Las Vegas in 1991, but also the aftermath -- George Bush's reaction upon hearing the details, the fate of the whistle-blowers, and the continuing struggle within the military over allowing women into combat positions.

**Planning as Persuasive Storytelling: the Rhetorical Construction of Chicago's Electric Future** by Jim Throgmorton. A unique examination of power, both political and electrical, by the much-missed former Iowa City City Council member.

**What the Body Told** by Rafael Campo. He's gay, he's Cuban-American, he's a physician, and he writes beautiful, bittersweet poems about death and desire.

**Class Issue** by members of AFT Local 716. The bound volumes of the first three years of this feisty union newsletter are now available from editor Roberta Till-Retz, 319-338-3446.

**A Stiff Drink and a Close Shave** by Bob Sloan & Steven Guarnaccia. Nostalgic photos and wry commentary on the stuff you found when

*Summer Reading List,  
continued on Page 5*

# Sadder But Wiser: Notes from the Democratic State Convention

Iowa Democratic Party leaders predicted a unified, streamlined convention for June. Unified? Yes, beyond any in recent memory. Streamlined? Not quite.

To be fair, many aspects of the state convention were well handled. The Credentials and Platform committees were marvels of efficiency, Arrangements committee members did their jobs admirably, and the staff were well prepared.

It was none of their fault that a convention beginning at 9:00 AM lasted until 3:43 AM the next morning.

State Representative Phil Wise of Keokuk, chair of the convention Rules committee, is the one getting most of the blame for the length. Wise's talents as a leader and organizer have probably been underestimated, and his tenacity in following an agenda is undeniable. State chair Mike Peterson appointed Wise to carry out his agenda on platform process. Sadly, Peterson did not take into account the value of convention management experience in a Rules chair.

Wise had none before this year.

It wasn't that bad, though. The hardy few who lasted till 3:00 AM entertained themselves well--filling the time with dancing in the aisles, singing patriotic folk songs, and all the schmoozing a political junkie could ask for. All that was missing was a floor demonstration.

But then floor demonstrations went out of vogue a while back.

They could have filled the time with platform debate, of course. Convention rules didn't allow for much talk. Platform discussion had been blamed for the excessive length of previous state conventions. The majority on the Rules

committee just didn't understand (and wouldn't listen when we of the minority expounded) that hog lots, the drinking age, and abortion don't keep you up till 3:00 AM.

"...party leadership still underestimates the value of platform debate as a unifying, educational process."

Ballots do. And ballots did--upward of forty of them. The last result of the last ballot for the last national alternate was announced somewhere around 3:40.

And party leadership still underestimates the value of platform debate as a unifying, educational process. It's hard for us to support each other on our issues if we don't understand them.

The press got the platform all wrong, too. Media types got hold of the "no same-sex marriage plank" line and wouldn't let it go. To read some press accounts you might believe that the issue was vociferously debated and then defeated. Funny, since the issue was never brought up--not in the platform committee, not on the convention floor. The issue rests quietly in the Johnson County Democratic Platform, waiting for its own time.

The press, of course, also deserves criticism for making same-

sex marriage a catchphrase for "way radical" without spending a column inch on the merits of legally recognizing lesbian and gay families.

The outcomes of the convention can be assessed as quite good, from a variety of political perspectives. The platform, though brief, emphasizes bedrock democratic issues like decent, secure jobs at decent wages, environmental protection, and universal health care--without neglecting family farms, civil rights, unions, and social services. The national delegates elected are a group diverse in age, gender, race, sexual orientation and political experience--a wedding of party leaders and newcomer activists.

Of course, this writer's perspective as a perceived insider may call into question his judgment.

So if you don't have anything nice to say about the state convention--as they say--come sit next to me.

— David Tingwald is chair of the Johnson County Democratic Central Committee and a member of the Iowa Democratic Party State Central Committee.

## Thanks!

To all of you who subscribed, renewed and submitted articles or ideas in the past 6 months. Remember, we'll send a free copy of the PP to anyone you suggest.



**T**he Iowa Coalition for Human Rights is a newly-formed organization whose goal is to work for civil and human rights for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people. The ICHR formed in response to anti-gay legislation in the 1996 State Legislature.

In the past six months, the ICHR worked on the defeat of the anti-same-gender marriage bill, held a GLBT Lobby Day in which over 100 people participated, and began to organize a state-wide network of GLBT groups, individuals, and allies. Anyone who supports civil and human rights for GLBT people can join.

Contributions and more info:  
**Iowa Coalition for Human Rights**  
Box 1222  
Iowa City, IA 52244

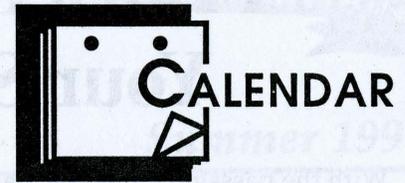
Call: 319-337-5870  
E-mail: rashanno@sprynet.com

## The Whole World was Watching

Were you at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago? I would like to interview for Public Access Television anyone who was a delegate, reporter, protester, police officer, observer, passer-by, whatever...

Please call me, Gary Sanders, at (319) 337-7739.

# Prairie Mouse's Picks



**The Frequency of Souls** by Mary Kay Zuravleff. The story of a brilliant though peculiar-looking refrigeration engineer named Niagara Spence who uses a huge satellite dish to contact the dead, who've been trying to contact her for ages. She is adored by Magazine Man, her office mate. Funnier than God.

**Accordion Crimes** by E. Annie Proulx. An Italian accordion-maker brings his instrument to fabled America, where it is passed from hand to hand, ethnic group to ethnic group, as the misfortunes of a growing country kill off each owner. A Polish Curse of the Paraohs.

**River Town** by Thomas Kenneally. Australian outback at the turn of the century. A traveler on horseback carries a large glass jar containing a human head. "Recognize her, mum? She looks to've had a rough go of it."

**The Giant's House** by Elizabeth McCracken. Mousy Cape Cod librarian falls in love with the tallest man in the world (8'7"). About what you'd expect. Best novel of the year.

**Hitler's Willing Executioners** by Daniel Goldhagen. As passionate and thoroughly researched a morsel of sustained Kraut-bashing as you are likely to find. They did it, Goldhagen asserts, because they wanted to.

— Paul Ingram works at  
Prairie Lights Books in  
Iowa City

July 23

### Forum on Public Transportation

Progressive Johnson County monthly meeting 7-9 pm, Iowa City Recreation Center. More info: 319-351-4515

September 28-29

### 10th Annual Prison Awareness Walk

from Newton to Des Moines. Contributions & more info: Criminal Justice Ministries, Box 70033, Des Moines, IA 50311

October 30

### Iowans Against the Death Penalty annual meeting

in Des Moines. Special guest: **Sister Helen Prejean**, author of *Dead Man Walking*. Contributions & more info: Box 27120, W. Des Moines, IA 50265.

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# Summer Blockbuster; Winter Masterwork

If you're a moviegoer you've probably seen at least the preview shot from *Mission: Impossible*: Tom Cruise propelled through the air and landing on a moving train. Frances McDormand, as Marge, detective star of *Fargo*, could never fly through the air like that, since she's seven-months pregnant and usually wrapped in heavy layers of clothing against the unfriendly Minnesota winter. Besides, except for one car chase scene unlike any you've ever seen, where all tension derives from filmmaking technique instead of special effects technology, nothing in *Fargo* moves very fast. In many ways, *Fargo* is the no-tech opposite of the high-tech summer blockbuster *Mission: Impossible*. It's action flick season and the profits are easy if you can afford the special effects. But no amount of effects are as special as the Coen brothers' visual sense. Their simple shot in *Fargo* of a squad car driving into the frozen mist is as compelling and unforgettable as anything in *Mission: Impossible*.

Special effects have come a long way since the *Mission: Impossible* days on TV. Jim Phelps, leader of the team, now has a computer on which he can view the action of each agent, plus video eyeglasses and wrist watches with monitors. In her investigation, Marge has to rely on the naked eyes of witnesses, whose sole description of one of the suspects is "funny looking." *Mission: Impossible*, which made a record \$75 million in its opening six days, has blockbuster written all over it, while *Fargo* seems to celebrate the lackluster--in its setting, its people, and above all in its treatment of the banality of evil.

The contrasts begin with the sound tracks. The *Mission: Impos-*

*sible* theme pounds into our ears with a force that will keep it there for days, accompanied by images flicked on the screen faster than you can say MTV. *Fargo* opens with a tentative harp gradually replaced by a plaintive violin as the image of a truck towing a car emerges at glacial pace from the barren winter landscape. *Mission: Impossible* plays out in the European capitols of Prague and London, *Fargo* is set in North Dakota and Minnesota. A far cry, and a "fur piece," from the international cast of *Mission: Impossible*, the people in *Fargo* are as predictable and monotone as the wintry weather and landscape, in a world where young people meet at MacDonaldis for a good time.

McDormand argues that *Fargo* is not satire or parody, but "a heightened reality." Therein lies the key to the Coen brothers doing in *Fargo* what I was beginning to think was impossible: elevating the ordinary in American life to art. These two movies are as different as their heroes. Tom Cruise as Ethan Hunt is in the Hollywood tradition of the loner on the run, the good guy branded bad out to avenge the injustice against him. Frances McDormand as Marge Gunderson is a law officer, a firmly rooted guardian of order in her little community. In a way, though, she is as alone as Ethan Hunt, since she seems to be the only person in Minnesota with a lick of brains.

There was a time when director Brian De Palma used his then wife Nancy Allen as the designated victim in his movies. He's at it again in *Mission: Impossible*: Phelps kills his on-screen wife, along with every other woman on his team. With *Fargo*, Joel Coen creates a feminist setting for McDormand, his off-screen wife. She is not only

the smartest person in the movie, she is also in control of every situation--even in the key scene that puzzles moviegoers and critics alike: Marge's meeting with old classmate Mike Yanagita. The Coen brothers say they wanted to show Marge in a different situation and out of uniform, but it shows a lot more. A married, pregnant cop in pursuit of a killer is suddenly being hit on by a man using a shameless sympathy-seeking lie. The fact that he is the lone Asian-American in such a homogenous world underscores the universality of this endless hassling of women, even pregnant, even a cop. Let's hope the Academy remembers McDormand's performance come Oscar time.

To those who charge them with "cruelly patronizing" their characters, the Coen brothers answer that they feel a real affection for these people from their native Minnesota. This affection is clearly tempered by the casualness of the casualties, but even that ironic distance is topped by the calculating cynicism of *Mission: Impossible*: Jim Phelps, American icon, a mole and traitor to his team? Say it ain't so, Mr. De Palma!

Phelps "turned" for money, showing the Free World turned Greed World. Money as the root of evil is about the only thing these two movies have in common. *Fargo's* villains kill for money, Phelps eliminates his team for money, and the makers of *Mission: Impossible* sacrifice Phelps for a money-making surprise ending and a sequel with the eminently marketable Tom Cruise as the new Phelps.

As Marge might say: "There's more to life than a little bit of money. I just don't understand it."

— Jae Retz

*Summer Reading List,  
Continued from Page 1*

rummaging through your father's dresser drawers, from swizzle sticks, tie tacks, and "men's magazines" like *Gent*, to engraved cigarette lighters, leather wallets with secret pockets, and other exotic paraphernalia of manliness.

**Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls** by the Guerrilla Girls. An anonymous pack of gorilla-masked avengers take on the "stale, male, Yale" art establishment. An inspirational blend of theory, practice, and humor.

**What America Wants, America Gets** by Joe Sharpnack. He looks like a burned-out linebacker, but the Iowa City-based cartoonist thinks like a cross between Herblock and Bart Simpson. Keep your eye on the career of this regular contributor to the PP.

**The Best of Enemies: Race and Redemption in the New South** by Osha Davidson. Another Iowa treasure, Davidson moves his focus from the rural midwest to Durham, North Carolina, to tell the true story of the friendship between a poor, black, militant woman and an Exalted Cyclops of the Ku Klux Klan. A profound portrait of

racism and class division, and how two people transcended them.

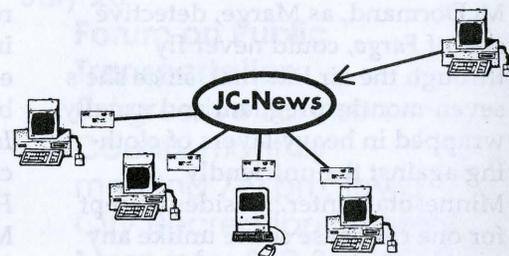
**Rocking the Boat: Union Women's Voices, 1915-1975** by Brigid O'Farrell & Joyce Kornbluh. Eleven oral histories of women who helped build the labor movement in 20th-century America. Illuminates the past and provides advice on current issues for women in the workplace.

**Does Conquest Pay?** by Peter Liberman. Even if you already know the answer, this study of occupied industrial societies is worth reading for its analysis of how conquerors manipulate fears and exploit internal divisions to maintain power. The fact that the author is related to Prairie Dog has nothing to do with this fascinating book's inclusion on the annual reading list.

**Four Ways to Forgiveness** by Ursula LeGuin. Four short novels featuring twin planets, a slave revolt, and futuristic battles between the sexes. What more could you want on a torpid Iowa night?

— *Prairie Dog*

# JC-News: The E-Mail Grapevine



JC-News is an automatic e-mail mailing list for Iowa City and Johnson County news, events and opinion. Anyone with something to say can send a message to [jc-news@netins.net](mailto:jc-news@netins.net). These messages are then bounced to all JC-News subscribers, either as they happen or in a grouped message the next day. More than 200 people—elected officials, local activists and people who just like to know what's going on—are on this FREE list.

To join, just send an e-mail message to:  
[jc-news-request@netins.net](mailto:jc-news-request@netins.net)

The subject line doesn't matter, but your actual message should read as follows:

subscribe  
quit

You'll get a welcome message with everything you need to know, including how to take yourself off the list.

JC-News is provided absolutely free of charge by Iowa Network Services. Jim Holthaus is the volunteer who maintains the list ([holthaus@io.com](mailto:holthaus@io.com)). A list of subscribers and a link to back issues can be found at <http://pobox.com/~rm/jcnews.html>

*Rusty Martin, [rusty.martin@pobox.com](mailto:rusty.martin@pobox.com)*

**THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE** has been published quarterly since 1986. Editor for this issue: Dave Leshtz.

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# PrairieFire Needs Your Support!

With the passage of the 1996 Farm Bill, the mission of government in encouraging widely dispersed land ownership by independent farmers has ended. The new policy of a "free-market" free-for-all, enacted at the behest of corporate agribusiness, will have devastating impacts on the environment with all-out fence-row to fence-row crop production, and on rural communities and rural families.

Your contribution will help PrairieFire continue:

- ✓ The Corporate Agriculture Organizing & Training Project
- ✓ The Rural Recovery Project
- ✓ Renewing Rural Iowa
- ✓ The Annual Rural Women's Conference



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Des Moines, IA 50309

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E-mail [pfire@netins.net](mailto:pfire@netins.net)

## THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

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Iowa City, IA 52244

If you assume that there's no hope, you guarantee that there will be no hope. If you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, there are opportunities to change things, there's a chance you may contribute to making a better world. That's YOUR choice.

—Noam Chomsky