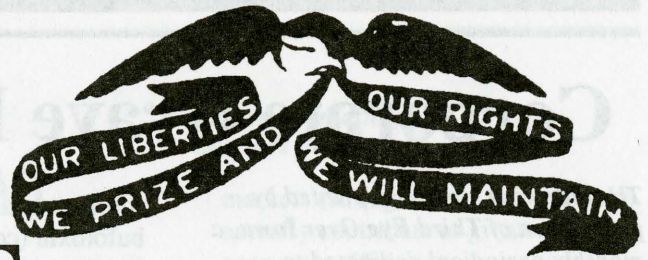


# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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Summer 1997

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

## Prairie Dog's Summer Reading List

"I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us."

— Franz Kafka

You want to relax with a book during the summer. You don't have much time to read, thanks to increased volunteerism, overtime, contributing to our national conversation on race, and checking your e-mail. Getting stabbed is not your priority this year.

Don't be alarmed. Not all of this year's list will break the skin, but all will leave at least a mild stinging sensation—enough to stir the blood and keep you alert amidst the smell of the hog lots and the clicking of casino chips.

### Krik? Krak!

by Edwidge Danticat

Nine passionate stories about life in Haiti, told by a young woman who remembers the beauty as well as the horror.

### May Sarton

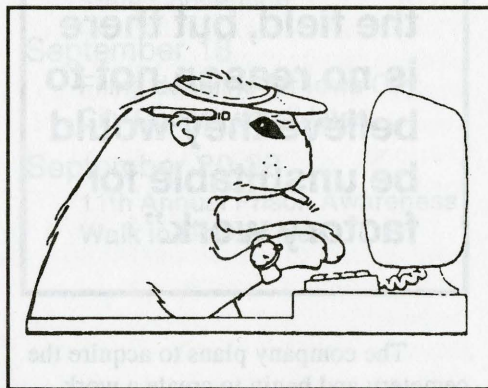
by Margot Peters

Sarton's poetry and memoirs blended banality and insight, creating a strong bond with her readers. Their loyalty will be tested by this intense bio of a "difficult, exasperating person" who slept with almost every literary figure of her

time (both male and female) and who entertained streams of visitors while extolling the joy of solitude.

### For the Hell of It: The Life and Times of Abbie Hoffman

by Jonah Raskin



As with Sarton, admirers may not want to know this much about the myth-making media master of the 60s, but Raskin raises tough questions about the power and the pitfalls of theatricality and charisma in protest politics.

### Undaunted Courage

by Stephen Ambrose

The perilous adventures of Lewis and Clark exploring Iowa and the Dakotas--before there were rest areas.

### Body, Remember

by Kenneth Fries

Not just another coming-out memoir.

This time, a Jewish gay man with a rare bone deformity discovers that disability is the hardest closet to leave.

### The Bear Went Over the Mountain

by William Kotzwinkle

While foraging for food in rural Maine, a bear discovers a professor's unpublished novel, takes it to New York, finds an agent who seduces him (although he prefers fur-bearing females), becomes a talk-show sensation, winds up on the bestseller lists, does product endorsements, and saves the life of the Vice-President.

### Field of Dreams (Harvest Time)

by Joe Sharpnack

The dark side of Iowa's biggest tourist attraction, portrayed in flip-book form by Iowa's most flippant--and most trenchant--syndicated cartoonist.

### Beloved by Toni Morrison

A lyrical nightmare of a novel about ex-slaves adjusting to "freedom" in post-Civil War Ohio. Read it before Oprah's movie version comes out next year.

### Everything for Sale

by Robert Kuttner

Invaluable ammunition for debates with free-enterprise fanatics. Kuttner argues that buffers and brakes on

Summer Reading,  
Continued on Page 5



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# Corporate Grave Robbers From Canada

The following story is reprinted by permission of *Third Eye Over Iowa*, a monthly periodical dedicated to tracking the paranormal in America's heartland. (You can visit their website at <http://www.yawp.com/3rd-i>.)

(Muscatine County)

A very large and notorious corporation from another country is, it is rumored, considering acquiring a parcel of land for expansion of its plant which contains within its boundaries an old country cemetery. At the time of this reporting the most often heard accusation is that the insensitive corporation will merely disinter the bodies and relocate them elsewhere. Disgusting enough, but hardly unusual in cases of corporate greed superseding moral decency. An anonymous source, however, has leaked a memo to our magazine which makes the Texaco racism scandal look like a Sunday morning cartoon show.

This company, which we have been advised by our legal staff to never publicly name (although we can imply that the acronym it goes by has no significance in the English language, and if spoken beneath the inverted apex of a pentacle at midnight on April 30th will conjure forth a demonic entity commonly associated with metallurgy and corruption) has deep rooted connections with the occult and a long history of antagonistic relations with labor. We know that several of its plants have been closed down rather than unionize when its employees complain of having to work inhuman hours in deplorable conditions.

It seems that the corporate elite of this foreign interest have found the solution to their labor force problems. The memo we received indicates that a "bokor", or Vodoun sorcerer has been recruited by the industrial giant. Along with the memo are requisition orders

for large quantities of bufogenin and bufotoxin (compounds fifty to one hundred times more potent than digitalis) as well as bufotenine, a hallucinogen. All these chemicals come from only one source, and that is the bouga toad. The company is also purchasing large quantities of millipedes, tarantulas, white tree frogs, four types of puffer fish, tcha-tcha seeds, consigne seeds, leaves from the pomme cajou tree, and other supplies. The toad extracts and other ingredients are all vital to creating a compound used in the creation of zombies!

**"Traditionally, zombies work in the field, but there is no reason not to believe they would be unsuitable for factory work."**

The company plans to acquire the cemetery and begin to create a work force of undead slaves who will work under any conditions and for no wage at all. Not even death would release them from their unending labor. Traditionally, zombies work in the field, but there is no reason not to believe they would be unsuitable for factory work.

We advise all those who live in the Muscatine area to make their own investigations into this matter and organize an effort to keep any company, whether Canadian or American, from attempting to cut costs by using dead people as a labor force. Contact your elected officials now and voice your concern that tax dollars might be being spent to facilitate any Iowa

corporation in the dumping of toxic chemicals which might cause injury to the living and unrest to the sleeping dead. There is no danger to the public from the zombies, other than losing your job to one. The real danger is that the bodies in the tiny cemetery will certainly not be enough to man all the workstations at this evil enterprise. Everyone in that county is in danger of becoming a zombie themselves. Instead of peaceful rest after a life well lived, those poor citizens would have to rise up again from their tombs to punch a time clock in a corporate sweatshop. Failing the passage of prohibitive legislation, we would remind our readers in the area that Haitians guard against this fate by "killing" their dead twice. Stabbing the corpse of a loved one in the heart or decapitating it soon after death are considered reliable preventatives for zombism. ☞

(*Third Eye Over Iowa* is published by Ristau Entertainment without any identifiable profit, so be advised that litigation would be fruitless. Our magazine contains adult situations, language and occult/religious themes which even Iowa City residents might find offensive. It is published for the purposes of entertainment only and if you believe anything in it, you do so at your own risk. Readers should be prepared to conduct their own investigations into the truth of the information and opinions presented, and be advised that the writers and publishers accept no responsibility for any danger, harm, mental or physical injury, or incarceration resulting from those investigations. So there.) ☞



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# Sometimes I Feel Like Just Another White Guy

(Washington D.C.)

I eat vegetarian sushi now, drink double-shot-esspresso-grande-mocha-blasts daily, and take the red line to work. I think I have become a "Yuppie." There's lots of us around here, walking fast to and from the metro stops that get us from apartments on the Northwest side to work downtown. I drop my dry cleaning off on the way to my metro stop like other yuppies and pick it up on the way home a few days later. We wear suits or other professional dress every day, sometimes tying on a scarf, flashy tie or other trendy accessory to prove that we are some how 'different' but still 'fit in.' It's easy to spot the other yuppies, by their clothes, manner and speed, but the truth is, they are almost all white here. And, practically everyone else who makes the yuppies' lives go round is not: the drivers of the metro, the sales clerks at the dry cleaners, coffee houses, grocery stores and drug stores, and the maintenance staffs in the buildings where yuppies work and live. Racial tension is subsequently real and ongoing in many ways. At times I realize that in certain situations, I am just another white guy.

I was with a co-worker (Brian Maney, white) at a major U.S. government agency the other day, trying to obtain some reference publications. We went to the appropriate room in the basement and I immediately noticed that all of the staff were African-American. I silently admonished myself for even noticing. A young man finally very slowly walked over to the short counter and my co-worker handed him a request. The man took the request and walked slowly to the stacks of publications. As Brian later remarked, "if he'd been walking any slower, he'd have been going back-

wards." After awhile, it was clear that he didn't know how to find the requested material and someone else took over, found the documents and gave them to us. During this episode, I realized very clearly that this is often

**"It's hard to know how to be a "good" white person, and what it means."**

what race relationships are like in D.C. I was just another white guy in a suit, in a hurry, on the other side of the counter.

How many times does that happen in this city every day? Brian and I talked about this on the way home, and earlier today as I thought about this article. African-Americans make up the vast majority of the district. I've seen statistics as high as 80%. And, many of the white people are huddled together in the Northwest neighborhoods. I am one of them, so is Brian. It's hard to know how to be a "good" white person, and what it means. Brian used to live on Capitol Hill, and attended a church that was predominately African-American, and some "liberal" whites. He left because he felt like whites were going to have too much influence in the church. After about a year he went to a mass there and the choir was full of white people.

I have decided to go against my liberal middle class upbringing that told me that race doesn't matter and it isn't even polite to talk about or notice. Race does matter, and it's complicated by class relationships as well. I am

trying to learn how not to be just another white guy: I look people in the eye; I take my time and make sure I am not inadvertently demonstrating that my time is more important; I say thank you and mean it; I recognize my own white, liberal, middle class, yuppie bias and guilt; and I acknowledge racial and class reality instead of politely ignoring it. ☪

— Julianna Johnston, former Program Director for Iowa Citizen Action Network, is now a corporate researcher with the AFL-CIO in Washington, D.C.

## Letter to the Editor

April 14, 1997

My answer to a question concerning moving people with disabilities into the community did not call for an explanation of task force recommendations. I was merely trying to say there are not appropriate community placements for everyone even though I believed the Governor's agenda was to shut down one or more of the four mental health institutions and consolidate the two hospital schools. Our report is a different subject, and I wasn't asked about it. I have more than a few faults but a poor memory is not one of them.

Best wishes,

Mark McCormick  
Des Moines



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# Keep Shooting—You're Slaying Me

"Life does not cease to be funny when people die, any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh."

George Bernard Shaw

A recent column on the sex scandals in the U.S. military opened with this thought: "you have to either laugh or explode with rage at the harm that's being done by ... our leaders in Washington." The author, president of The Heritage Foundation, chose to explode with rage.

Southern Baptists are also serious about sex, especially when it doesn't add to our population growth. Their boycott of the family-friendly Disney empire for granting benefits to the same-sex partners of its employees proves that they'll cut off their mouse ears to spite their sour faces. These Baptist boycotters could've saved themselves a lot of national embarrassment by choosing a different issue, one that has greater implications for this country's population figures than same-sex marriage.

More than 13,000 people are killed each year by handguns. (Des Moines Register 6-19-97)

If they had rummaged around a bit in the cluttered closet of Disney's vast holdings, they could've found a violence peg to hang their boycott on instead of the sexual one. They would've discovered that two Disney divisions, Hollywood Pictures and Buena Vista Pictures, produced and distributed *Grosse Pointe Blank*, our first ever comedy about a professional killer!

For years violence has kept Hollywood laughing all the way from the box office to the bank. But professional killers as the source of yuks is a new development. It started with the hip, funny hitmen of *Pulp Fiction*, Samuel L. Jackson and John Travolta. Life-sized cardboard cutouts of *Pulp Fiction* characters appear in a shootout

scene in *Grosse Pointe Blank* as homage to its spiritual predecessor. But *Grosse Pointe Blank* is a lot more fun than *Pulp Fiction* and doesn't have that movie's drugs or racist, homophobic underbelly. If Disney were going to make a movie about a professional killer, *Grosse Pointe Blank* would be it--it's about as small-town, family-values wholesome as a movie about a professional killer can get.

6,276 students in 29 states and the District of Columbia were expelled last year for bringing guns and other weapons to school. (DMR 6-17-97)

John Cusack plays Martin Q. Blank, a young hitman returning to his community after disappearing a decade ago. He's coming home for his 10-year class reunion to see Debi (Minnie Driver), whom you might call the "girl of his dreams," since he's been obsessively dreaming about her 5 nights a week for 6 years since standing her up on senior prom night 10 years ago. Of course, he's also there on a job assignment.

The premise joke of the movie is treating "hitman" as just another job. Debi's wealthy father approves, because it's a "growth industry." But the end of the Cold War has flooded the market, prompting Blank's chief rival Grocer (Dan Aykroyd) to try to organize a union for hitmen. Blank, not big on meetings, would rather be a scab. Still, Blank is a good worker, and he's also a good boss, who has put aside a stash of money for his secretary as "profit sharing." The theme of hitmen as normal workers reaches an absurd height when these two stop shooting at each other long enough to cooperate in gunning down two federal agents, causing Grocer to shout triumphantly "Workers of the world unite!"

You might be wondering how this smart, witty movie handles the ingrained killing-is-bad ethic, or as Debi puts it: "There are some things you

don't do in a civilized society." Poking fun at a couple of hallowed American institutions helps take the sting out of his killing. Blank tweaks both capitalism: "A psychopath kills for no reason. I do it for money." and the military: "I joined the Army, then went into business for myself." As a last resort he pulls out a variation of the vigilante justice defense Schwarzenegger used in *True Lies* to explain his killing to his unsuspecting wife--that they were all bad guys. Blank: "If I show up at your door, chances are you did something to put me there."

Let's not lose sight of the family-friendly side of this Disney production. Blank's most brutal slaying occurs in the high school in front of his old locker, and is performed with a pen, once the sine qua non of education. And the grand finale shootout takes place in his sweetheart's home, not in the traditional abandoned warehouse.

Over 33% of homes have guns. (DMR 5-6-97)

This last home-on-the-firing-range scene, where enough rounds are fired off to wipe out Blank's entire graduating class, unites the themes of killing and community. In the hail of bullets Martin both wins Debi's hand in marriage and disposes of his arch foe by smashing his head in with a television set, the centerpiece of today's hearth and home.

44 million Americans own 192 million guns. (DMR 5-6-97)

But wait a minute. There might be a trade off. Recent medical research has found that laughter enhances our immune system. Laughter stimulates body cells that attack tumor cells and viruses. So when we laugh at movies that make light of guns, thereby possibly increasing our chances of getting shot, we are actually decreasing our chances of getting cancer.

*Keep Shooting,*  
Continued on Page 5

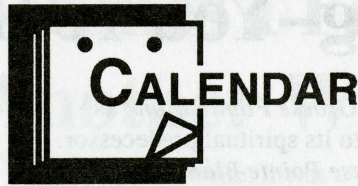


**Keep Shooting,**  
Continued from Page 4

The number of young murderers in the United States has tripled in the last decade ... the number of juvenile murderers using guns quadrupled .... (Cedar Rapids Gazette 3-8-96)

*Grosse Pointe Blank* is still playing in theaters, at the same time that the U.S. Supreme Court waters down the Brady bill and the world celebrates (yes, celebrates) the 50th anniversary of the invention of the AK-47 rifle, which has killed more people than any weapon in history. Maybe someday out of the haze of second-hand smoke, the realization will emerge that guns--more than cigarettes or same-sex marriage or adultery or any foreign nation--are our greatest national threat. Until that day, those of us who haven't been wounded yet can keep on laughing. It's good for us. ☞

—Jae Retz



**July 26**

Americans with Disabilities Act 7th Anniversary Celebration in Iowa City

11:00 AM: March from Public Library to City Park

Noon: Rally at the old zoo area

1:00 PM: Live music featuring Kevin Burt

**August 9**

Little Richard at the State Fair

**August 13-15**

Iowa Federation of Labor State Convention

**September 18**

Filing deadline for Iowa City City Council candidates

**September 20-28**

11th Annual Prison Awareness Walk in Des Moines

**Summer Reading,**  
Continued from Page 5

markets (strong unions, for example) actually contribute to greater economic efficiency.

**Beginning Shepherd's Manual, 2nd Edition**

by Smith, Aseltine, & Kennedy. From buying and breeding to castrating and cooking, former Solon farmer and PP contributor Sundry Smith breathes new life into the ancient tradition of raising sheep. The 3rd edition is rumored to include a chapter on cloning.

**The Dogs of Winter**

by Kem Nunn. Despite the title, this depths-of-the-human-psyche novel is perfect summer reading: sharks, mysticism, and redemption through surfing.

**Race Rules:**

**Navigating the Color Line**

by Michael Dyson. Self-described "hip-hop intellectual" defends rap music, proposes that churches pass out condoms on collection plates, and asserts that race will always rule because the rules are changed whenever blacks make progress.

**Lives of the Monster Dogs**

by Kirsten Bakis. Your schnauzer will never seem the same to you. ☞

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Which one of Iowa's five U.S. congressmen voted in June against a proposed constitutional amendment to ban "flag desecration?"

The first person to call 319-351-2973 with the correct answer wins a free subscription to the PP and a handsomely-printed copy of the Bill of Rights.



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# Yet Another Letter to the Editor

June 27, 1997

The race for governor of the great state of Iowa is about to begin. The political writers for the Des Moines Register, especially that mouthpiece for the conservative right, Mr. Yepsen, seem to think that Jim Ross Lightfoot will be governor. Now folks, I don't want to be crude or vulgar, but the thought of that man as governor of this state makes me want to vomit! I have no idea who the Democratic party will choose. I don't even know if we have a Democratic party in this state anymore.

Consider this. When the Iowa Republicans decided to give a big tax break to the rich people in this state, only three Democrats in the entire Iowa House voted against it. I live in Jasper County, and my democrat

(little D) representative, Paul Bell, said--and I quote--"It was the only thing on the table, so I voted for it." Now folks, if Mr. Bell was thirsty, and the only thing on the table was a glass of poison water, do you think he would drink it?

I myself like this fellow Vilsack, but whoever is chosen, if they present themselves to me as a Democrat, they had better walk like a Democrat, talk like a Democrat, and vote like a Democrat, and believe in their heart that being a liberal is as close to God as a human can get without becoming an angel.

And, while we're talking about Democrats, there is a group of people in Washington calling themselves "Blue Dog Democrats." Well, I'm no youngster, but in my day we didn't allow those people the dignity of

calling themselves Democrats. They were Dixiecrats back then and they're Dixiecrats today, and Dixiecrat spelled backwards is Republican!

To all my liberal friends, I say this: don't be discouraged. The conservatives may seem to have the upper hand right now, but you are the thinkers, innovators, and visionaries, and the world needs you. The conservatives are all shook up about this cloning business, but I see an exciting possibility. Just think, we could clone a Harkin and a Boswell, and teach the new ones to vote like Democrats. ☪

— Olie Lambert  
Newton, Iowa

## THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

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**"I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country... Corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed."**

— Abraham Lincoln, 1864