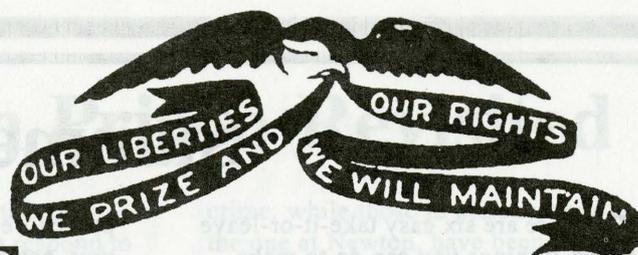


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



22

Summer 1998

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Prairie Dog's Summer Reading List

The Communist Manifesto

by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels
Still rings true after 150 years.
Required reading for all patriots.

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly

by Jean-Dominique Bauby
The true story of the editor of *Elle* magazine who became totally paralyzed, told without sentiment or fake hope, but with plenty of humor, grace, and art. Miracles abound, even when holding perfectly still.

Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance

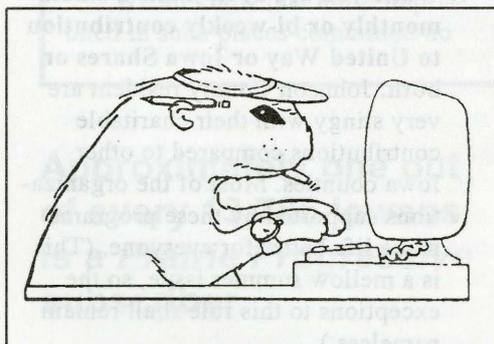
edited by Karal Ann Marling
Read this before taking your kids to Orlando. If it's too late, read Carl Hiaasen's **Team Rodent: How Disney Devours the World.**

Field of Schemes: How the Great Stadium Swindle Turns Public Money into Private Profit

by Joanna Cagan and Neil deMause
If any issue can unite working people, sports fans, community activists, and taxpayers of all stripes, it's the way billions of public dollars wind up in the pockets of team owners. Why are US cities subsidizing new arenas and stadiums to the tune of \$11 billion in the 90s, while study after study shows minimal economic benefit to anyone except the owners? This book tells you why they do it — and how to stop them.

Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock 'n' Roll Generation Saved Hollywood

by Peter Biskind
Heavy on gossip, light on movie-making, and never answers the question asked in the title, but worth reading for quotes like this one from Dennis Hopper on *Easy Rider*: "The cocaine problem in the United States is really because of me."



Bridget Jones's Diary

by Helen Fielding
Still not over mourning the loss of Lady Spencer? Bridget's search for love, success, and thinner thighs will ease your pain. On the other hand, Prairie Lights maven Paul Ingram calls it "one of the silliest books I've ever tried to read."

Spin Cycle: Inside the Clinton Propaganda Machine

by Howard Kurtz

A brutal glimpse at the way the President and the press exploit each other.

Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963-1964

edited by Michael Beschloss
A brutal glimpse at the way the President and the press exploited each other 35 years ago.

Self-Storage

by Mary Helen Stefaniak
The finest collection of short stories by an Iowan since James McPherson's *Elbow Room*.

The Time of Our Time

by Norman Mailer
Fifty years after *The Naked and the Dead*, Mailer is still writing novels & essays filled with insight, wit, prophecy, scatology, megalomania, sheer brilliance, and outright nonsense. This 1300-page retrospective (The Wall Street Journal called it "a *Forrest Gump* for intellectuals") confirms that no writer can equal Mailer's searing vision of life in America's fifth half-century.

The Battle of the Janes: The All-True Travels and Adventures of Lidie Newton

by Jane Smiley and **The Short History of a Prince**
by Jane Hamilton
After trying to convince *New York Times* readers that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a better book than *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,

Summer Reading,
Continued on Page 5

Summertime Dues

Here are six easy take-it-or-leave-it things you can do to make Iowa City, or any community, a better place to live. Not one of them requires passing a new law or city ordinance, or infringing on constitutional rights, or even telling your neighbors what to do. Not one of them is expensive, and one or two of them will save you money. Not one of them requires you to call a list of people, raise money, host a coffee in your home, write a letter to the editor criticizing an elected official, or choose the lesser evil in a general election or Democratic primary

- 1. Do not put any more weed killer on your lawn.** The stuff runs off into creeks and rivers into the Gulf of Mexico, killing shrimp and brown pelicans. Kids and pets track it into the house and on to your carpet. The weed killer companies say that there is no scientific proof that it is harmful, and point the finger at others. But after reading the warning label carefully, you will probably conclude: why take a chance? Iowans lived for many years without the advantages of weed killer. Save your money and let the dandelions grow, or get some exercise pulling them up, or hire someone to pull them up.
- 2. Do not keep firearms in your house.** When kids shoot other kids, they get the guns from the homes of parents, friends, and relatives, or they break into someone's house and steal them. If you are worried about violence, make your home a weapons free zone. You will not run the risk of mistakenly pulling a gun on a friend or family member. In fact you will be safer, and everyone else will be too.
- 3. Pay your dues.** It is hard to think of anything that makes life better for people at work than having a decent labor union with a decent grievance

procedure. If you are in a bargaining unit, get in the habit of having your dues deducted from your paycheck. Your union cannot represent you effectively without your dues. You will notice the deduction at first, but you will get used to it after a while. And you will contribute to making your workplace better for everyone. Even if you are not covered by a collective bargaining contract, it often makes sense to pay your dues. For instance, if you are a University of Iowa faculty member, you can join the American Association of University Professors and/or the American Federation of Teachers Local 716. And anyone can join the Labor Party by sending \$20 (\$10 if you earn less than \$10 an hour) to The Labor Party, P.O. Box 53177, Washington DC 20009.

- 4. While you are at it, make a small monthly or bi-weekly contribution to United Way or Iowa Shares or both.** Johnson County residents are very stingy with their charitable contributions compared to other Iowa counties. Most of the organizations supported by these programs make life better for everyone. (This is a mellow summer issue, so the exceptions to this rule shall remain nameless.)
- 5. Put your money in a credit union.** The banks whine about the small tax breaks that credit unions receive, but there is another reason why they are cheaper than banks. Their profits are redistributed to the members who live in the local community (i.e. you) instead of going into the hands of wealthy shareholders, who are often investors from the suburbs of St. Louis or Phoenix or some other metropolis. Credit unions serve their customer-members just as well as banks, and sometimes better. You can use the money you save to pay your dues.

- 6. Walk, bike, or ride the bus.** The scientific evidence is in: a thirty minute brisk walk each day makes you healthier and happier. You will live longer, and enjoy life more. During your brisk walk you will inhale automobile fumes, but by walking you will be reducing the volume of fumes, and reducing the number of cars on the road. That makes life safer for bicyclists, and cheaper for taxpayers, who are forking over huge sums to all levels of government to make way for the automobile, and for ugly new parking garages.

Add your own suggestion to the list, but remember: make it easy to do. Otherwise, no one will do it. ☞

- Jeff Cox

“Cynicism is chic, but costly. Surrender or withdrawal challenges nothing. We must engage, engage, engage to make things happen.”

– Jesse Jackson

Standing by Tammy Wynette

A few of the founding fathers of the Iowa City Gay Liberation movement whimsically adopted Tammy Wynette's 1969 hit song, "Stand By Your Man," as an anthem.

Why Wynette acquired a following in other progressive or even hip local circles is more difficult to explain. In her genuine and impressive rags-to-riches story, she represents the proletariat in a sense, but back then, more than now, country music had a strongly right-wing aura, as evidenced by close associations with George Wallace and Merle Haggard's forthright anti-hippie anti-Viet Nam war protestor song, "Okie from Muskogee." It must have been a cult thing; by definition, the appeal of cult classics is supposed to be paradoxical or at least partly inexplicable.

Tammy Wynette died recently at age 55, tragically young, yet ancient in a world that now regards her as an influential foremother to several generations of singers. Despite decades of intense competition from ever-younger, more shrewdly marketed "girl singers," she held onto the title of First Lady of Country Music and the nation mourned her accordingly. Of all the blonde women now singing on country music television, there may not be one who makes the covers of as many supermarket tabloids when she dies.

Another First Lady proclaimed in 1992 that she was not "some Tammy Wynette...standing by her man." Hillary Clinton had to apologize for this odd slur, which has since become even odder. If the song advocates tolerating a husband's infidelities (a claim that has been disputed), what's so superior about blaming them on right-wing conspiracies?

Wynette was married five times, to be sure, but when she died she was

cloaked in the dignity of a marriage that lasted more than twenty years. Her most publicized marriage, to her childhood idol George Jones, represents the most extreme poles of what marriage might mean to a woman. It

"...half the feminist community in Iowa City wouldn't even speak to a man, let alone stand by one..."

started as an incredibly glorious fairy tale, dissolved in a bitter public struggle with alcoholism and other demons, and concluded in a civilized reconciliation period during which the pair, each remarried, occasionally got together and sang their old duets.

"Stand By Your Man" is not only Tammy Wynette's signature song; it's also the title of her 1979 autobiography. This book contains the following response to controversy over the famous song: "Although I consider myself a lot more liberated than many of the 'sisters' who criticized the song — especially when it comes to things like financial independence, raising children alone, and running a business, I am emotionally dependent on men and I wouldn't want it any other way."

That wasn't the last word on the matter, of course, but the song hit a nerve and stirred up a debate that isn't over yet. At any rate, the song and the

singer have had an impact on American cultural history that few if any of today's bewildering bevy of photogenic chart-toppers can ever hope to duplicate. ☞

- Pam Saur is a former Iowan now living in Beaumont, Texas

I began to listen to Tammy Wynette in the late 60s and early 70s, just when my peers and I were coming into our own as feminists.

We never analyzed our interest in Wynette; we just listened. At times the music seemed like high camp. While half the feminist community in Iowa City wouldn't even speak to a man, let alone stand by one, we still listened. And we certainly perked up our ears when Wynette sang "I Don't Wanna Play House." It could have been our anthem.

I stopped listening to Wynette in the 80s and 90s. I was too busy playing house, raising our kids and being a working woman. But this year, on the day I moved out of my house after my 21-year-long lesbian relationship ended, all I could think of was "my D-I-V-O-R-C-E became final today."

This was the allure of Tammy Wynette. She was a strong woman who sang about what was at the root of good old 70s-style feminist consciousness-raising. She told the truth about her life. ☞

- Francie Hornstein is a former Iowan now living in Oakland, California

Seinfeld, Bulworth, and Morality at the Millennium

When Susan Sontag wrote in 1964 that “Jewish moral seriousness” was one of the two pioneering forces shaping modern sensibility, she couldn’t see *Seinfeld*, the “show about nothing,” waiting in the 90’s.

The only thing *Seinfeld* was ever serious about was keeping secret the final show, which turned out to be an in-your-face memorial to nine years of not caring. This much-hyped finale gleefully flaunted the moral vacuity of its four characters.

I’ve watched only a handful of *Seinfeld* episodes (including the finale, which left me not feeling sad that I had missed nine years of it). Granted, the actors were brilliantly at home in their roles, there was plenty of knowing urban humor, and for many, the New York setting alone was worth the watch. But the show also had about the most cavalier contempt for women I’ve seen this side of violence. Only later did I learn that that was the point.

Early on, an NBC exec called the show “too Jewish.” Its celebrated mantra became “no hugging, no learning.” (No learning? That’s Jewish?!) Let’s not forget “no decency.”

In the finale, the cast witnesses a car-jacking, which one of them videotapes while the others make jokes about the overweight victim. But this runs them afoul of the local Good Samaritan law; they are found guilty of “criminal indifference,” and sentenced to a year in jail.

The judge nicely summed up the wellspring of *Seinfeld* humor when he pronounced that the four had rocked the foundation of society with their “callous indifference and utter disregard for everything that is good and decent.” *Seinfeldians* doubtless thought that a hilarious bit of moral pomposity.

It didn’t seem quite as funny when only two days later a 15-year-old Black boy bled to death outside a Chicago hospital because emergency room staffers claimed they weren’t allowed to leave the premises and come to his aid.

One wonders if the super hip *Seinfeld* people were embarrassed to find themselves praised in the emetic *National Review* for providing “apolitical laughter” with their anti-PC humor.

[With George Carlin, I reject “politically correct” as a right-wing term. I use it here for transitional purposes only.]

Bulworth has its share of jarring politically incorrect moments, but its right-on all-too-correct ones are what the movie is about.

It opens with a despondent Jay Billington Bulworth, Democratic senator from California, watching campaign videos of himself. He has sold his soul for votes, hid his liberalism in the darkest corner of the closet, and trampled Republicans in his party’s rush to gain the political middle ground, all the while making re-election his one true issue. It’s Warren Beatty, an admitted “depressed Kennedy liberal,” playing a Clinton Democrat.

Surrounded by photos of civil rights heroes, Bulworth is sickened to death watching himself denounce welfare and affirmative action as he repeats the platitude “America is standing on the doorstep of a new millennium.” So he has put out a contract on his own life. With nothing more to lose—including the impending election—he simply starts telling the truth.

Bulworth is both silly and serious, serving up trenchant social commentary in the midst of a preposterous plot. Could there be a more Black-friendly movie that feasts so bawdily on Black

stereotypes? But when taking up arms against the entrenched powers why shouldn’t Beatty borrow the hottest weapon of the most politicized part of our population—rap music?

Ignored (when not maligned) by white Americans, rap is politics set to music. Some segments of our society might still have time for “Silly Little Love Songs,” but not the endangered Black youth of America.

Thanks to Senator Bulworth, rap finally gets a national audience. With more reason than rhyme, he exposes policies, not profanity, as the true national obscenity. He even puts in a good word for socialism. After so many years of a tepid American liberalism not even daring to use the “L” word, *Bulworth* blows into the desert of national politics like a blast of Arctic air.

Beatty calls his movie a “tragic farce.” When all is said and done, it’s also a masquerade. It’s a liberal white man using a radical Black medium.

Some national treasures won’t step through that door to the next millennium: *Seinfeld*, Senator Bulworth, Sinatra, the Chicago Bulls, to name a few. But the least mourned will be the most missed. Bella Abzug could have been the model for Sontag’s Jewish moral seriousness. Abzug’s stupendous moral courage made her many enemies. Commenting once on all the names and epithets she had garnered, Abzug concluded: “But whatever I am ... I am a very serious woman.”

Someone at Sinatra’s funeral declared with *Seinfeldish* aplomb that “heaven will never be the same.” Let’s end with a more *Bulworthy* sentiment from a friend of Bella’s at her memorial, who predicted her first action would be “to immediately begin petitioning God for better conditions—for the people in hell.” ☾

— Jae Retz



July 9, 1958

US invaded Lebanon

July 25, 1998

Americans with Disabilities Act
Rally & Celebration
College Green Park, Iowa City
More info: 319-338-3870

Aug. 1-2, 1998

Hardacre Film Festival
Hardacre Theater, Tipton
More info: 319-886-2213
wacabs@aol.com

Sept. 7, 1998

Labor Day Celebration
Hosted by Hawkeye Labor
Council, Hawkeye Downs,
Cedar Rapids
More info: 319-396-8461

Sept. 11, 1973

Chile's democratic government
overthrown in CIA-backed coup

Sept. 15, 1963

16th St. Baptist Church in
Birmingham bombed

Newton Prison Revisited

I appreciate the fact that Gary Sanders took time to respond to my article in the Spring issue of the *Prairie Progressive*.

Yes, I am very much aware of the history of Theresienstadt. Our guide for the experience there had been imprisoned there. He was one of many members of the clergy who were there. One member of our group was a German woman who had been a child at the time of World War II. At the end of our tour this woman broke down and cried and she was comforted by our guide. It was not because she or any member of her family had participated in carrying out the atrocities which had caused her so much pain and guilt, but rather that German citizens, especially the Christians, had not recognized the signs that such things could and were happening.

We all know that those imprisoned in such places committed no

crime, while those in prisons, such as the one at Newton, have been found guilty of a crime against society. There is a line, however, which we must not cross, when it comes to punishment of such prisoners. Once we cross that line we are guilty of cruel and inhuman treatment. If we turn the other way or condone such punishment it can set the stage for what happened in Germany. If we meet people who are carrying out such punishment in our name and they seem to take pleasure in it, we must sound the alarm.

I do not believe that we should do as Mr. Sanders suggests and simply let the Nazi victims rest in peace. It can happen again and in the memory of these victims we must be ever watchful. ☪

— Jean Basinger works with
Criminal Justice Ministries
in Des Moines

Approximately one out of every 13,785 lowans is a *Prairie Progressive* subscriber.

Summer Reading,
Continued from Page 1

Smiley proves she's no match for Harriet Beecher Stowe, let alone Mark Twain. Meanwhile, Hamilton shows she can go 15 rounds with the best American Novelists.

Do the Windows Open?

by Julie Hecht

A macrobiotic photographer is obsessed with a gynecologist named Dr. Loquesto, who may or may not be a figment of her imagination.

The Death of Frank Sinatra by

Michael Ventura

Written before the fact, this is the best *noir* ever written about the Vegas mob. Second-tier gangsters act tough while living on the salaries of university program associates. ☪

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

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The Wells Fargo Goons

(To the tune of "The Wells Fargo Wagon" from *The Music Man*)

EDITOR'S NOTE: In response to the current organizing drive by the nurses at University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, UIHC hired Management Science Associates to "assist in the free flow of accurate information." UIHC contracted with Wells Fargo Security to "supplement" its existing (unionized) security forces.

O-ho the Wells Fargo goons they are a tryin' to scare us
But they can't scare you and me
O-ho the Wells Fargo goons want to intimidate us
But together we'll build solidarity

All we want is respect in our workplace
And a voice in the way things are done
Our patients won't get the best healthcare
If we let R. Edward Howell put us on the run

O-ho the Wells Fargo goons they are a spying and snooping
But we'll never let them get in our way
While Howell, Borg, and Staley meet to bust the union
We just keep on getting stronger every day

All we want is respect in our workplace
And a voice in the way things are done
Our patients won't get the best healthcare
If we let R. Edward Howell put us on the run

Oh MSA gets paid to spread dis-information
But they can't fool you and me
Oh they can take their 90 grand, go back to Kansas City
While we keep on building solidarity

Lyrics by Peter Fisher, David Leshtz, and Shelton Stromquist

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

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I am not a centrist.
Bella Abzug
1920-1998

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