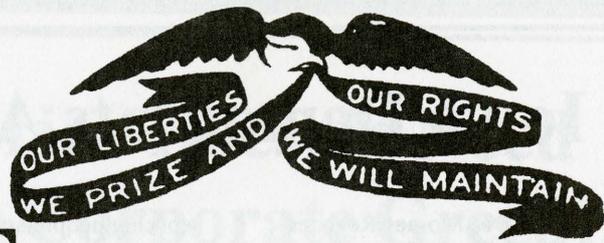


THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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Summer 1999

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Prairie Dog's Summer Reading List

For the Time Being
Annie Dillard

Aphoristic reflections on good, evil, the nature of time, and *The Big Picture*. "When confronted on his crimes, Ted Bundy, murderer of twenty-six, said, 'but there are so many people.'"

*Health Care Divided:
Race and Healing a Nation*
David B. Smith

Learn why American hospitals were – and often still are – even more segregated than public schools. A lively chronicle of endemic discrimination that links history, political science, public policy, and organizational behavior through vivid first-hand accounts from the 1920s to the present.

*Harper's Magazine –
January 1999*
Barbara Ehrenreich

A from-the-bottom account of life as a low-wage worker. When Al Gore boasts about "welfare reform," you'll remember Ehrenreich's article about of the humiliations, hidden costs, and constant anxiety of trying to make ends meet at \$5.15 an hour.

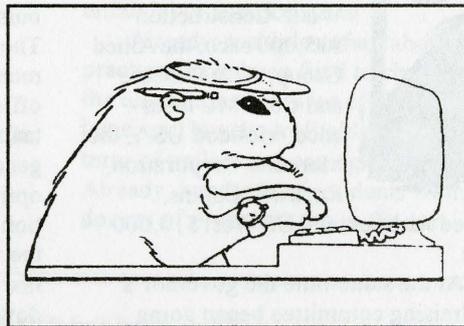
The Intuitionist
Colson Whitehead

A novel of the speculative present, with different eras blending together in a dissonant world where the

protagonist bears the peculiar burden of being the first female African-American elevator inspector.

*The Spirit Catches You and You
Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her
American Doctors, and the Colli-
sion of Two Cultures*
Anne Fadiman

You'll never look at epilepsy – and Western medicine – the same way again.



*A Change is Gonna Come: Music,
Race, and the Soul of America*
Craig Werner

An on-the-beat guide to connecting the dotted lines between civil rights, religion, music, and politics – from Muddy Waters to Public Enemy, with Springsteen and Iris Dement in between.

*Just Kidding:
Cartoons for Grownups*
Catherine Doty

A former Iowa City artist manages to keep her sense of humor while living in Staten Island.

Meditations from a Movable Chair
Andre Dubus

One of the best-written and least sentimental books about disability you'll ever find. Dubus' description of riding from Boston to Chicago on a train with no accessible bathroom concludes with the former Marine looking up at a large American flag on the wall of Union Station: "I felt that it did not include me, it did not want me." Recommended for the Supreme Court justices who gutted the Americans with Disabilities Act.

House of Sand and Fog
Andre Dubus III

The son writes almost as well as the father. The sand is the Third World, the fog is America, and the house is everything humans have fought for since time began.

The Orchid Thief
Susan Orlean

The sexual aura of the orchid (from the Latin word for testicle) attracts saints and sinners, poets and pirates, breeders and back-stabbers. They're all here in a jubilantly squalid tale of passion and obsession in the Florida swamps.

Honor Roll,
Continued on Page 6

Iowa Democrats Awash in Big Money

Even the Des Moines Register concedes that the Iowa labor movement has won a big victory in defeating the two constitutional amendments limiting state spending. Much of the credit should go to Mark Smith and other officers of the Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO. When every other progressive in the state had virtually conceded defeat to the forces of David Stanley and Iowans for Tax Relief, the State Fed took him on directly and won.

This is not the only recent referendum win for progressives in Iowa. Sales tax referenda in both Johnson and Polk County were defeated this spring. But despite winning these battles, the left is still losing the war over taxes.

Localities are still limited by the legislature to the sales tax as a means of dealing with local needs. Taxes have been re-structured statewide to emphasize regressivity. We have won some elections by appealing directly to the people, but continue to lose out in the legislature. Why is that?

Progressives often mistrust direct votes by the people, fearing that the majority is at heart conservative or that rightwingers will out-spend us and not allow us to get our message out. Obviously in Iowa the problem lies not with the popular vote, but with our elected officials. Labor has much less influence with elected officials, at the city and state level, than with the public at large.

Part of the problem is fairly simple. If labor and other progressives are to have any influence with elected officials, they are limited to Democrats. During the last twenty years, the Democratic Party of Iowa has become more and more accountable to wealthy investors, and less accountable to

working people and their unions. The Iowa Democratic Central Committee, which used to be an organization accountable to grass roots Democrats through the caucus and convention process, is now a soft money fundraising machine

The entire process was illuminated by the Des Moines Register last January as they documented the flow of right-wing corporate money into the Vilsack inaugural committee. Governor Vilsack depended heavily on labor to get elected. As soon as he won his unexpected victory, Republican corporations who had supported Lightfoot began pouring money on the governor. Alliant Energy, Mid-America Energy and the Principal Financial



Group put in \$25,000 each; Anheuser Busch, Pioneer Hy-Bred, Schuerling Plow Pharmaceuticals, and Weitz Construction \$15,000 each; the Allied Group, AT&T, Deere and Co. EMC Insurance, McLeod USA, the Meredith Corporation, Rockwell Collins,

United Airlines, and US West \$10,000 each.

At the same time the governor's fundraising committee began going after business contributions, using a handful of wealthy Democratic donors to offer right-wing donors a chance to act as a counter-balance to the influence of the labor movement. In the long run, labor will be outspent in the battle for influence in the Iowa Democratic Party, and will have to get in line behind these big donors.

The same thing is happening at the lower levels of politics. Consider last fall's state senate race in Johnson County between progressive liberal Democratic State Senator Bob Dvorsky and Republican Mary Howard.

Dvorsky has had strong local support from local unions, and received considerable financial support from the Iowa labor movement. But investors poured money into the Dvorsky campaign. (Credit here goes to Green Acre News, which published the public records of financial contributions in their February 1999 issue). The Associated General Contractors and Master Builders chipped in \$1000 each; Iowa Certified Public Accountants \$600; the Iowa Farm Bureau, Drive Political Fund, and Iowa Medical PAC \$500; the Credit Union PAC \$400; Mercantile Bancorporation, Clark McLeod, Iowa Travel and Tour PAC, Alliant for Good State Government; Iowa Life Insurance PAC, \$250. Other PAC contributions included GTE Corporation, Mid-American Energy, Manufactured Housing, MCI Iowa, Iowa Pharmacy, and Iowa Podiatry.

The Iowa labor movement is being outspent inside the Democratic Party. These PAC's are not wasting their money keeping Senator Dvorsky in office. He has a 100% pro-regressive tax voting record, having supported the general sales tax increase, the local option tax for schools, the 10% reduction in the progressive income tax, and the virtual abolition of the inheritance tax. When labor's friends vote straight down the line for a tax agenda favoring investors and big corporations, the labor movement has nowhere to go. Working people are entirely shut out of the political process.

What can we do about this? Take some small steps. Subscribe to Green Acre News by sending \$20 to 4222 Harmony Lane SE, Iowa City IA 52240-9385. Join the Labor Party, so the labor movement will have somewhere to go: \$20 to The Labor Party, PO Box 53177, Washington DC 20009. ✂

— Jeff Cox

Facing History and Ourselves

(This essay received Honorable Mention in a contest for high school students sponsored by the Iowa City Human Rights Commission in the spring of 1999)

I was watching the six o'clock news one evening. Interrupting my normal television-watching comatose state, the anchor began to tell the story of James Byrd, a black man hitchhiking in Texas, who was picked up by some white supremacists. He was beaten severely, then chained to the back of a pick-up truck and dragged through gravel for three miles until he was decapitated.

I don't ever remember having a physical reaction to the news before, and I hope it never happens again. After hearing the story, I became ill. My stomach churned and I had to consciously hold down my dinner. This was a totally new experience for me. I am usually so indifferent to what is going on around me, because the events on the news don't happen to us. They're just stories that get shoved into my brain along with my biology homework and glow-in-the-dark nail polish. Thinking about it, I understand that it's true, but the facts still don't affect me, because I have become numb.

Perhaps it's numbness, and perhaps it is a bit of laziness. Speaking to my baby-boomer mother and her friends makes me feel envious, frustrated, and inadequate. They grew up in a time when it seemed that young people spent their energy trying to right wrongs all over the country and the world. Not to be a traitor to my generation, but teenagers today are known for our bad music, violence, and basically being slacking Beavis-and-Butthead worshippers.

On the other hand, my uncle was a freedom rider during the civil rights movement, my mother and grandmother protested to get a swimming pool integrated, and they were all successful. As I was talking with my mother and her friends, I told them that I wish I

was part of a generation that realized human rights issues are in every city in every country across the world, and actually feel that we could and should reduce prejudice, discrimination, and other injustices.

Perhaps I'm not giving my friends and myself enough credit. We have accomplished things. I spent the summer after my freshman year volunteering in San Francisco in AIDS clinics and in nursing homes in impoverished neighborhoods. I remember in my eighth grade leadership class we had to report on what we thought was the biggest global problem today, and invite a speaker to come talk about the issue. We had experts come in to discuss teen pregnancy and homelessness as well as several other topics. Having lost an uncle to AIDS in 1992, I asked a person living with the virus to come in with his doctor and speak to the class. And just this year, motivated by Helen Finken's "Facing History and Ourselves" class about genocide, two City High sophomores started the first Amnesty International club at the school. They plan to start letter-writing campaigns to various countries to free political prisoners.

By talking to my mother's friends, I came to understand what is missing from myself and my peers. Learning about the civil rights movement and the radical sixties led us to think that each protester or activist was making a huge difference. However, in reality, the changes during that time came from all the small things that added up.

I think that what we still need to realize is that just a simple change in attitude can affect the future. Every little extra effort we make really matters. Not because changes will come immediately, but because by making that effort, you prove that you are no longer indifferent. So now, all we have to do is begin. ✕

— *Anna Kudsk is a 16-year-old Aquarius who lives in Iowa City and likes long walks on the beach, Friends, and dining in fine restaurants. Serious offers only.*

Move Our Money

As the military budget rises to 280 billion dollars, there is finally a citizens' effort to combat runaway Pentagon spending. Ben Cohen, of Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, has gathered 450 business leaders into an organization called Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities.



Iowans for Sensible Priorities, as part of this effort, is working to gather signatures from Iowans who believe that we must cut 15% of the Pentagon's budget and MOVE OUR MONEY into education, health care, and child care. Our goal is to gather 100,000 signatures before the February 7th presidential caucuses.

To sign a petition or volunteer to collect signatures, call Gary Sanders at (319) 337-7739.

How Accessible is Hollywood?

Violence is not the only movie theme being placed under the cultural microscope in this country. This spring, the University of Iowa's Cinema & Disability Group hosted "Screening Disability," the first conference anywhere on the confluence of film and disabilities. A major goal of the conference was to show us how movies shape our perception of disability and how we can use these films "to understand the nature of being human." If anger is a big part of being human, the conference succeeded brilliantly.

As with most academic conferences, this one had its share of maddening, field-specific jargon. But virtually all of that came from the cinema side of the equation. The urgency of the disability issue leaves no time for word games. The conference ran the gamut from one presenter answering a question with: "I don't know what I would say on that, but I can quote other people," to a presentation so inspiring that an audience member told the speaker afterwards that she wished he lived here so they could go to movies together. These were two of the most eye-opening days of this "AB" (able-bodied) spectator's life.

Saturday's Keynote Speaker, Paul Longmore, was beamed in live from San Francisco State University. An acknowledged guru of the disability movement, his remarks made it easy to see why.

Longmore suggested three ways of looking at Hollywood's representation of disability: the "moral," the "medical," and the "social" models. In the first, disability is presented as a punishment (Olivier as Richard III) or as a means of redemption (*Rain Man* redeeming his brother). In the "medical" model rehabilitation or overcoming is the only way the person with a disability can gain entrance to society (*The Stratton Story*). The "social" model (*My Left Foot* is Longmore's favorite) confronts

the viewer head-on with the prejudice and discrimination absent in the other two models.

To Longmore, the medical model is the most harmful to the disability movement. These "overcomer stories" are usually filled with self-pity and rarely show people encountering societal discrimination or institutional lack of access. The medical model depoliticizes disability because people are taught how to adjust instead of organizing for change. Longmore is trying to shift the focus away from the individual and onto the system.

There was no danger that Billy Golfus, who came in person to show his documentary *When Billy Broke His Head*, would depoliticize disability. Golfus suffered brain damage from a motorscooter accident in 1984, and repeatedly warned the audience about his tendency to lose his train of thought.

Starting from the premise that people are afraid of disability, Golfus was determined to make his movie real for an AB audience: "We start by showing a quad getting dressed, so you know we aren't fucking around." His movie introduces us to some of the leading activists in the disability movement. We also meet Billy's social worker in a revealing "spenddown" scene. Seems that "the system," the unrelenting enemy of disability, thinks Billy is getting too much financial support. (One study estimates that out of every disability support dollar, 33 cents goes to the clients and 66 cents to the servers.) If you are afraid of disability, or would just like a look into that world, see *When Billy Broke His Head*.

One of Billy's lines in his movie—"Being disabled is as close as you can get to being invisible"—could have been the headline of Sunday's keynote address by Marty Norden, author of "The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies."

Norden observed that in society, people with disabilities may be invisible, but not in Hollywood. From 1912 to 1930 alone, the industry produced about 430 movies with disability themes. Many of these were from the silent era, which Norden said practiced a "cure or kill strategy." Characters that couldn't be cured of their disability were eliminated, or, as in today's movies and society, they are "otherized," demonized, and forced into a charitable underclass to keep them unequal.

To me, it has always been a great irony that the same phenomenon that pushes millions of ordinary people to the fringes of society can be the ticket to an Oscar in Hollywood. Just look at the Best Actor winners since Dustin Hoffman won for *Rain Man* in 1988: Daniel Day-Lewis for *My Left Foot* (1989), Al Pacino for *Scent of a Woman* (1992), Tom Hanks for *Forrest Gump* (1994), Geoffrey Rush for *Shine* (1996), and Jack Nicholson, whose character was spiced up with a disabling neuroticism, in *As Good As It Gets* (1997). That elusive quality that artists seek to set their characters apart comes ready-made when the character has a disability.

That's Hollywood, getting AB actors to portray characters with disabilities.

But how's it going in the real world for people with disabilities, for many of whom the hardest part of the day is getting up and ready for it? One leading activist in Billy's movie says "Anger is one of the best things we got going in this movement."

The unfeeling, bottom-line driven majority on our local City Council got a taste of that anger recently when it tried to downspend the paratransit system for people with disabilities. It was quite a scene in the council

How Accessible is Hollywood?
Continued on Page 6



America Doesn't Need More Corporate Greed!

Support Elk Point, S.D., Workers

July 13, 1949

The Pope excommunicates all members of the Communist Party

July 24

Americans with Disabilities Act anniversary celebration and rally
College Green Park, Iowa City,
11 AM-4 PM

July 30, 1974

House Judiciary Committee votes to bring three articles of impeachment against President Nixon

August 2, 1924

James Baldwin born

August 17, 1939

The Wizard of Oz premieres

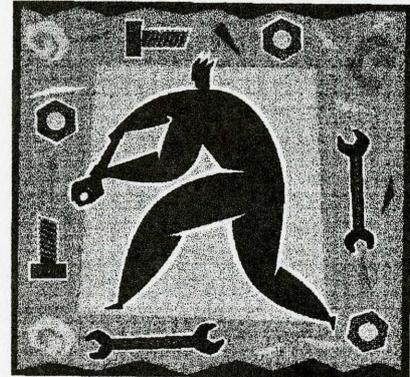
August 20, 1619

First slaves brought to America

Seventy workers in the tiny town of Elk Point, South Dakota, just across the river from Sioux City, IA, are under attack by a giant multinational corporation intent on destroying their union, UE Local 1187. The company has decided its number one priority is union-busting, regardless of what it costs.

CMI Corporation refuses to bargain in good faith with workers at its Load King Trailer manufacturing plant, even as it seeks to pick their pockets by dramatically raising the cost of their health insurance. This display of corporate greed and arrogance has shaken the stability of this little prairie town and caused a four-month-old unfair labor practice strike.

Already, multiple unfair labor practices have been filed to challenge the outrageous behavior of CMI, a huge, and hugely profitable, manufacturer of trailers and paving equipment. Already, hundreds of residents from dozens of organizations in the sur-



rounding region have rallied to the aid of the workers and their union.

Now the trailer makers of UE Local 1187 are taking news of their struggle to CMI dealers and customers, and workers at other CMI locations. Help these proud trailer makers in South Dakota send a message on behalf of all American workers: All workers deserve respect! These rights must be respected! All workers deserve affordable health insurance!

WHAT CAN YOU DO? Please write or call CMI Trailer Division President Steve Hillard at its corporate headquarters. Tell him that citizens and customers support the trailer workers in Elk Point, and demand that CMI respect workers' rights and settle the strike immediately. Calls, letters, or e-mail can be sent to:

CMI Corp.
140 Morgan Road, PO Box 1985
Oklahoma City, OK 73101
Tel: 405-787-6020
E-mail: shilcmi@aol.com ✂

— Deborah Herman is President of UE Local 896-COGS, UI teaching and research assistants.

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Summer Reading List,
Continued from Page 1

***Crack in America: Demon Drugs
and Social Justice***

Edited by Harry Levine & Craig
Reinarman

Remember how crack cocaine was said to be an unstoppable tidal wave about to engulf your children? Was the 'crack epidemic' really just the 'crack scare'? Ever get the feeling that the meth problem in Iowa was exaggerated for political purposes? Read this level-headed look at the American 'drug problem' and call your legislator.

The Astrology Sourcebook
Shirley Soffer

Well, why not? More Jungian psychology than star-gazing, more

history than horoscope, more entertaining and less pretentious than the self-help books you secretly read.

***When the Kissing Had to Stop:
Cult Studs, Khmer Newts, Lan-
gley Spooks, Techno-Geeks, Video
Drones, Luddite Dystopians,
Serial Killers, Vampire Media,
Alien Sperm Suckers, Satanic
Therapists, and Those of Us Who
Hold a Left-Wing Grudge in the
Post-Toasties New World Hip-
Hop***

John Leonard

If you only read one book
this summer.... ✂

How Accessible is Hollywood?,
Continued from Page 4

chamber jam-packed with wheel chairs—the physically challenged down below struggling heroically against the ideologically challenged on their elevated perches. Longmore would've been proud. These people politicized their plight, took on the system, and the real challengers won.

Let's let Paul Longmore have the last word: "We will continue to do what we have to do to survive, but let the world know that it doesn't have to be this way. Social responsibility shouldn't be left to charitable impulse."

Remember the anger. ✂

— Jae Retz

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**"The best art is
unquestionably political
and irrevocably beautiful
at the same time."**

—Toni Morrison