

# Dogs in the Night: Prairie Dog's Summer Reading List

*"If the book we are reading does not wake us, as with a fist hammering on our skull, then why do we read?"*

—Franz Kafka

## **Riding the Bus with My Sister**

*Rachel Simon*

A lonely and neurotic Bryn Mawr professor regains her sanity by hopping on board the life of her 'retarded' sister.

## **Winter Kill**

*C.J. Box*

The Sovereign Citizens of the Rocky Mountains are camping in Twelve Sleep County, Wyoming. They're straight out of Ruby Ridge, but no more evil than the deranged U.S. Park Ranger hot on their trail.

## **Sea Biscuit:**

### **An American Legend**

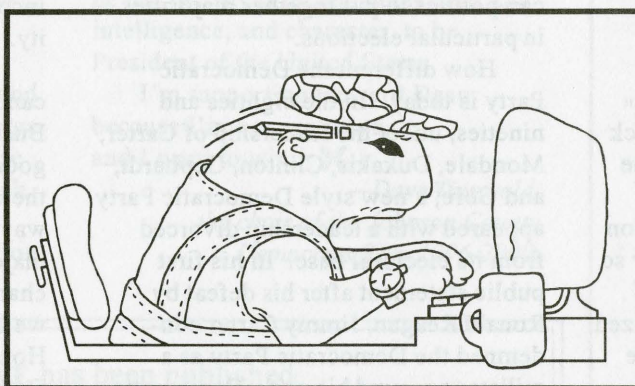
*Laura Hillenbrand*

Think you wouldn't be interested in the best-selling biography of a racehorse? Think again. A vivid slice of post-Depression America, a meditation on the nature of celebrity before TV, and plenty of sex and drugs (among humans, too).

## **The Terrorist Next Door: The Militia Movement and the Radical Right**

*Daniel Levitas*

Dedicated "to the farmers of Iowa and the memory of Dixon Terry," this



exhaustive study verges on paranoia – or does it? In one form or another, the Posse Comitatus and the Christian Patriots will always be with us.

## **Niagara Falls All Over Again**

*Elizabeth McCracken*

Witness the rise and fall of Vaudeville through the tragicomic adventures of an Iowa version of Laurel and Hardy.

## **Painting in the Dark**

*Russell James*

Learn how an intelligent, well-intentioned person could be attracted to fascism.

## **Story and Sustainability**

*Jim Throgmorton and  
Barbara Eckstein, editors*

Two University of Iowa professors use compelling narratives to teach lessons about controlled urban development and ways to promote it. Chapters include a look at the Iowa City Peninsula and the Bluestem landfill in Linn County.

## **The Peppered Moth**

*Margaret Drabble*

A female family saga filled with – naturally – disappointment, resentment, and unfulfilled dreams. It's set in England, but keep your eyes open for a character from Iowa City.

*Summer Reading,  
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# We Need a Democratic Electoral Majority

For nearly fifty years after the landslide victory of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, the Democratic Party was the natural majority party in America. Two party competition remained vigorous, and Republicans could win temporary victories and assemble interim majorities. At almost every level of government, however, the New Deal electoral coalition provided working majorities for Democrats except in those parts of the country with the strongest traditions of Republican voting.

With hindsight, the New Deal electoral coalition can only be called bizarre. It encompassed white southern segregationists and immigrant Jews on the lower east side, Catholic blue collar workers in northern cities and Protestant family farmers in the border states, technocratic liberal intellectuals with enormous faith in science and prohibitionist followers of the anti-evolutionary rhetoric of William Jennings Bryan. No wonder it fell apart, many commentators say. It could never last, especially after Black voters rallied to the party in the wake of the 1964 civil rights act.

If the New Deal electoral coalition was so bizarre, why was it stable for so long? The answer lies in a reality of American social life that is marginalized in mainstream political discourse, the reality of social class. The great institutional achievements of the New Deal—Social Security Act, the National Labor Relations Act, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation—each brought highly visible benefits to the wage-earning majority of Americans. The federal government was seen to act on behalf of the average citizen as rural electric cooperatives lit up the American countryside, and highly visible public works program brought jobs to hundreds of thousands of unemployed

Americans and useful public buildings to the general public. Even Ronald Reagan was nostalgic about the WPA!

For fifty years the Democratic Party periodically renewed its political capital by rallying new versions of the New Deal coalition based on an appeal to the common interests of wage earners, homeowners, and family farmers. The New Deal tradition represented a kind of underground socialism in America, at a time when openly socialist parties in post-war Europe were putting even more extensive New Deals in place. Truman's Fair Deal, Kennedy's New Frontier, and Johnson's Great Society were based unabashedly on an appeal to the majority of Americans who work for wages. The Democratic Party was not in flight from its base. Instead, it crafted programs that appealed to its electoral base, and then reached out to the non-ideological "center" of American politics to put together majorities in particular elections.

How different the Democratic Party is today. In the eighties and nineties, under the leadership of Carter, Mondale, Dukakis, Clinton, Gephardt, and Gore, a new style Democratic Party appeared with a leadership divorced from its electoral base. In his first public statement after his defeat by Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter condemned the Democratic Party as a millstone around his neck. Democratic leaders began to re-orient themselves to the new, enormous reality of American politics: corporate funding of elections in both parties.

Along with the money went ideas, many of them drawn from the global resurgence of neo-liberal corporatism, and almost all of them hostile to the idea that governments should intervene in markets to protect the interests of wage earners. It came to be accepted as conventional wisdom that Democratic Party has a big problem with its own electoral base, and must "move to

the center" in order to win. Heavily dependent on corporate donors to fund their campaigns, Democrats have followed that strategy right down to the local level.

What has been the result? Republicans are the majority party now at every level of government, controlling the White House, congress, governorships, state legislatures, and the courts. How do they do it? By behaving very much like the Democrats formerly behaved. First they rally their base, and then reach out to people who don't think in terms of left and right in order to win elections. The conventional wisdom—distance yourself from your base—appears to apply only to Democrats, not to Republicans. Republicans are not the least bit ashamed to represent corporations, super-rich investors, the Christian right, and our imperial military machine. They don't distance themselves from their base; they incorporate it into an electoral majority.

Every one of the major Democratic candidates is capable of beating George Bush, who is sinking in the polls with good reason. Our country is moving in the wrong direction in fundamental ways, and there is a potential electoral majority that recognizes the need for change. In order to change direction, we badly need a Democrat in the White House, but we need more than a Democrat in the White House. We need a revived Democratic electoral majority.

An interim Democratic presidency that leaves the Republican electoral majority intact will no more change the direction of the country than did the interim Democratic presidencies of Grover Cleveland and Woodrow Wilson during a previous period of Republican rule. Take note of what Bill Clinton's victories did for the Democratic Party. The soap operas of the

*Democratic Majority,  
Continued on Page 3*

Clinton administration simply distracted attention from the downward spiral of Democratic electoral fortunes. A new Democratic majority can only be forged by new Democratic political leadership committed to the restoration of a Democratic electoral majority.

All of the leading Democratic candidates for president appear to believe the conventional wisdom. All of them are proud of their ability to offend one or more of the key constituencies in a potential Democratic electoral majority. They believe distance from their base makes them more electable. Only one candidate in the entire Democratic field recognizes the need to revive a durable Democratic electoral coalition, and that is Dennis Kucinich. He is attempting to bring together the unions and the anti-war movement, environmentalists and corporate liberals, feminists and working class Catholics, African-Americans and civil libertarians, because he is not ashamed of standing up for Democratic Party constituencies. Kucinich understands the need to rally an electoral base, and then reach out to non-ideological voters, including the elusive white southern vote.

How can he reach out to the center? With support for programs that no other Democratic candidate will touch despite having solid majority support from the American electorate. Ever since Truman, majorities of Americans have supported universal national health insurance. If given a chance, they will vote for a candidate who campaigns for it. Furthermore, there is no issue more important to the wage earning majority of Americans than good jobs at good wages. Kucinich will cancel NAFTA and the WTO agreements, re-negotiate them in ways that protect jobs, and create popular New Deal style public works programs to fill in the gaps. He is the only Democrat who can campaign in every part of the country on a program of good jobs at good wages, because he

## Don't You Feel Safer Now?

Sleep well this summer, prairie dogs. Your safety and security are being closely supervised by none other than the federal BATF. Rechristened in 2002, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms AND EXPLOSIVES is now in charge of all fireworks beyond sparklers, snakes (those without mercury) and caps used in cap pistols. Wouldn't it have been a shame if they had interfered with your right to teach your children to use toy guns?

Want to set off a few Roman Candles for the entertainment of your family or neighbors? Not to worry. You can get a permit, for one-time use, allowing you to purchase fireworks and transport them across a state line. This will require fingerprints, a photograph, a background check and a personal interview with an agent of the Bureau of ATF & EXPLOSIVES for you and any of your family members or employees who will be using fireworks. The permit process takes 90 days, so start in April if you want to display your patriotism on the 4th of July.

You say you haven't got time to be fingerprinted, photographed, background-checked and interviewed plus

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is the only Democrat willing to offend corporate donors and neo-liberal intellectuals in order to stand up for the interests of wage-earners.

Can he do it? Democratic polling now reflects nothing more than name recognition. Why else would anyone support Lieberman? Kucinich has little name recognition, but we can supply it in Iowa if we stop staring into the crystal ball in search of wisdom about electability, and look at the big historical picture. If enough progressive Democrats in Iowa turn out for Kucinich in the caucuses, name recognition and money will follow. Iowans could make history by setting in motion a New New Deal. ❧

—Jeff Cox

the accompanying paperwork? Not to worry. No doubt others will take time, and you can hire them to set off your fireworks. And you thought prisons were the only growth industry.

Unsure about whether the fireworks you bought in Missouri are covered by this law? The Dept. of Transportation has thoughtfully labeled display fireworks (those considered hazardous Class I Explosives, not to be confused with consumer fireworks like those caps you use to teach your children to point and shoot) with the numbers #0333, #0334 or #0335. Consumer fireworks are numbered #0336 or #0337. Just check those numbers.

Bureau of ATF & EXPLOSIVES has also promulgated new rules on transportation and storage of fireworks. You will now need an approved magazine to store the fireworks prior to your display. This storage facility must be separated from highways and other buildings, well-locked, and designed to prevent theft. Another economic development opportunity for the person who can sell you the magazine or let you use theirs.

Be advised that these rules are not to ensure your personal safety when using fireworks. They are not intended to protect you from the danger of losing an eye or a finger, or worse, from careless handling of explosives. There are still state laws and local permits required for that. This law ensures NATIONAL safety and security and is intended to prevent future incidents like the Shoe Bomber.

Check it out on the Bureau of ATF & EXPLOSIVES web site at [www.atf.treas.gov](http://www.atf.treas.gov). And sleep well in the knowledge that anyone commemorating the Rockets Red Glare or Bombs Bursting In Air has been thoroughly vetted for national security purposes. Don't you feel safer now? ❧

—Junk Yard Dog, a Johnson County Elected Official who is making her first appearance in *The Prairie Progressive*.

# There's Got to be a Better Way

In information-saturated Iowa City, where the university and affiliated hospital are the biggest employers, education ostensibly the central enterprise, and knowledge the currency, dependable statistics on certain topics are remarkably hard to come by.

A faculty-student committee seeking figures on alcohol- and drug-related arrests during the past academic year could find no plain and simple accounting. The reasons are manifold—campus and city police have overlapping purviews and compile reports in various ways; student and non-student statistics often are combined and different degrees of offense co-mingled; university disciplinary procedures may or may not parallel criminal proceedings.

Even harder to pin down are the consequences of young people's encounters with the law for what some people would call dumb behavior. Offenders go to jail, pay fines, do community service, attend sobriety programs. Those completing probation for a first offense may have records expunged; others may feel compelled to lie on financial aid forms or graduate school applications.

What we do know is that Iowa students should not be surprised if, sometime during their college career, they get cited or arrested for underage drinking, for possession of small amounts of pot, for being drunk in public, for mouthing off to police officers and/or for otherwise making substance-impaired nuisances of themselves. Analyses of nationwide campus crime reports consistently rank the University of Iowa high on these sorts of measures.

At some level, firm numbers are beside the point, since different constituencies see different pictures. In a town where every third person is a college student, where every other downtown doorway is a bar, where seven or eight times each autumn the campus football stadium and surround-

ing parking lots accommodate the population once over, anecdote acquires the proportions of myth.

Evicted from the dorm for a marijuana seed. Ticketed for underage drinking three days before turning twenty-one. Hassled while walking home a bit loaded, but bothering no one. These are the stories students tell. Whether the exception or the rule, young people experiencing, seeing or hearing about such episodes easily conclude that authority figures—police, administrators, the so-called grownups making the rules who long ago had their youthful fun—are out to get them.

On the one hand, the university promotes counter-alcohol education through the Stepping Up program, funded generously by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. On the other, during football season tailgating parties become no-arrest zones. Homegrown Hawkeyes football icon Tim Dwight, now a San Diego Chargers wide receiver, is even financing a new liquor store in his hometown. Meanwhile, the lad or lass of 18, responsible enough to vote and expendable enough to get shipped abroad to fight wars, cannot legally buy a beer.

Stepping Up publicizes alarming rates of alcohol consumption by UI students—in the latest study, 60 percent admitted to "binge drinking," defined for males as five or more drinks in one sitting and for females as four or more. These interpretations are disseminated like gospel, but many students feel they unfairly characterize an entire cohort as out of control.

Student drinking needs to be viewed as a cultural issue—historically, alcohol has lubricated the social scene here and elsewhere; underage drinking and substance experimentation are perennial markers of youthful self-assertion; and in any case those of age don't always provide distinctly superior role models. Drinking also is an industrial byproduct; one recent study shows that young people see more TV commercials for alcoholic beverages,

which the industry claims are aimed at viewers 21 and up, than for products properly intended for them, such as sneakers, jeans, chips or gum.

Like most folks when they're sober, I'm no fan of inebriated fighting, of the vomit and garbage drunk people leave around, of the guys who pee in the alley—or, in a favorite story from the Iowa City police, on the donut case at the mini-mart. I'm dismayed when students' chronic carousing interferes with their work for classes I teach. And we all know that alcohol lowers inhibitions and is an obvious factor in unwanted and unprotected sex.

But I'm no less bothered that so many students face considerable consequences for youthful mistakes that hurt them more than anyone else—and we are not talking about drunk driving or drug dealing here. Another recent study suggests young people have a biological propensity toward risky behavior because the neurological switches to deter it have not yet been formed in their developing brains. Not that we should excuse students for their excesses; but are the penalties and their possible long-term repercussions congruent with the offenses?

My brother, a prosecutor in Boston and alum of that large public institution reverentially known as "Zoo Mass," asserts that arrest rates are no reflection of crime rates. Rather, they reflect enforcement, and ultimately how ready prosecutors are to follow through on charges initiated by police. The evidence in this town suggests a discretionary imbalance. Deterring and punishing drunk driving, heavy-duty dealing, sexual assault, domestic abuse, things like that, are priorities. Meanwhile, walk the drunkards home, pour out the kegs, don't waste efforts on small amounts of a weed whose possession our civilized neighbors in Canada already have decriminalized. Improve peer counseling and alternative channels for resolution. There's got to be a better way. ✕

—Judy Polumbaum, Iowa City

# A Progressive Wants to Win

Progressives, by their nature, want to win. Progressives want progress. Progressives want to pro-gress, literally to “step forward.”

Not leap. Not stand still in certainty of moral rectitude. Not let things fall back rather than step forward imperfectly. Just step, and forward.

Unlike some who call themselves progressives, I’m not out to express myself, or be heard, or be right or pure or perfect or recognized, or make a statement, or hold accountable or move some abstract entity.

I want to elect someone to move things forward. I want to win.

That’s why I’m supporting Howard Dean for President.

I’m supporting Howard Dean for President because I want live in a country and a world where life is better for ordinary people. Not perfect; better.

I’m supporting Howard Dean for President because he can win the Democratic nomination. Dean is statistically tied for second in Iowa and first in New Hampshire, and has a large and growing national grass-roots base that the other candidates cannot touch.

I’m supporting Howard Dean because he can win the general election

by energizing the Democratic base, and speaking persuasively to the middle. Dean’s progressive social values on civil rights, the environment, and education move us to action. His pragmatic approach to economic issues — expanded health care access through existing programs, and balancing the federal budget — reassures average Americans that he’s on their side.

I’m supporting Howard Dean for President because he envisions an America and a world that I want to live in, one where the United States leads by example and strength, not through bullying and violence.

I’m supporting Howard Dean because he speaks cogently, and talks about things that will make a difference to ordinary people. I’m supporting Howard Dean because when he talks about an issue, most likely he talks from a record of success in Vermont. I’m supporting Howard Dean because he has the strength, and demeanor, and intelligence, and character, to be President of the United States.

I’m supporting Howard Dean because I’m a progressive, and I want to win. ✂

—Dave Tingwald,  
the chair of the Johnson County  
Democrats from 1996-2000.

## Words

“How can you care passionately about issues without caring equally passionately about implementing them?”

—Congressperson  
Barney Frank

“When smashing monuments, save the pedestals — they always come in handy.”

—Steenislow Lec,  
Polish Holocaust  
survivor & satirist

“War is only a cowardly escape from the problems of peace.”

—Thomas Mann

“I don’t know why we think, just because we’re mighty, that we have the right to try to substitute might for right.”

—Sen. Wayne  
Morse, who voted  
against the Gulf of  
Tonkin Resolution,  
1965

“I think we agree,  
the past is over.”

—George W. Bush

“This is the worst president ever. He is the worst president in all of American history.”

—Helen Thomas

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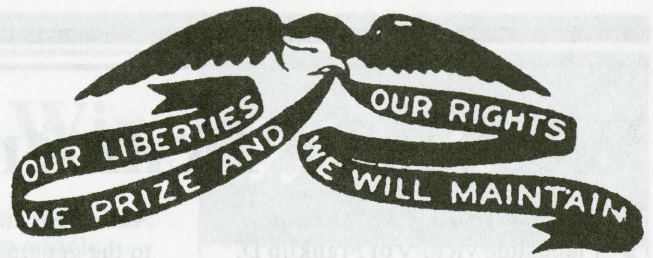
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# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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Summer 2003

*A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT*

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—Franz Kafka

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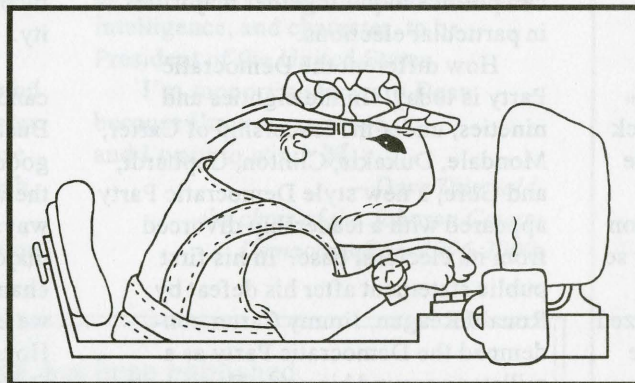
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