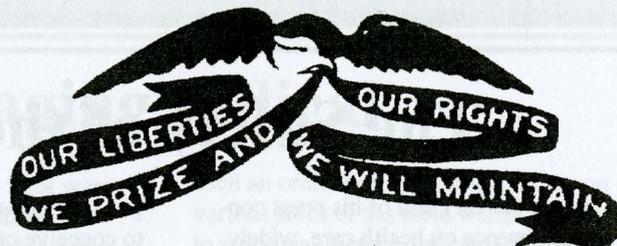


# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



August 2009

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*A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT*

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## You win a few, you lose a few: Prairie Dog's Summer Reading List 2009

**Biographical Dictionary of Iowa** by David Hudson, Marvin Bergman, Loren Horton. Annotated biographies of the forgotten as well as the famous. Perfect for serious research, idle browsing, and complaining about who was left out.

**The Master and Margarita** by Mikhail Bulgakov. Magical realism meets Stalinism. Bulgakov weaves together a visit to 1930s Moscow by the Devil and his posse, the tortured love between the title characters, and the Master's novel about the crucifixion of Christ. What more could you ask?

**Progressive Nation: A Travel Guide** by Jerome Pohlen. A pocket history of influential progressive events and their locations. Entries are listed by seven geographical regions, with time-saving tourist tips, like whether related buildings still exist and are open to the public. Worth reading, even if you never leave town.

**Hit and Run** by Lawrence Block. A stamp-collecting hit man stalks the streets of Des Moines for one final job before retirement. As he is distracted by the opportunity to buy some rare issues in Urbandale, disaster strikes.

**The Accidental American** by Rinku Sen. Money flows freely in the world economy, but labor does not. This contradiction is embodied in the true story of a Moroccan-born waiter

in a World Trade Center restaurant destroyed on 9/11. As sympathy for victims of terrorism turns into anti-immigrant fervor, all the racial, cultural, moral, and economic conflicts of current immigration policy are vividly illuminated. A book on globalization that won't bore you, and will help you explain to Fox News fans in your life why immigration and national security have virtually nothing to do with each other.

**Last Night at the Lobster** by Stuart O'Nan. A wry, poignant, and oddly inspiring novel about the final twelve hours of a Red Lobster being closed down by corporate headquarters. You will never under-tip your server again.

**Iowa: The Definitive Collection** by Zachary Michael Jack. From Chief Black Hawk to Carrie Chapman Catt, from Colored Women's Clubs to Aldo Leopold, the cultural richness of the Land Between Two Rivers astonishes natives, transplants, and visitors alike. Don't miss baseball star Bob Feller's unadorned description of small-town life in Van Meter in the 20s and 30s.

**We** by Evgenii Zamiatin. Before there was 1984, there was 1921, when this novel depicted a future society where all walls are glass to facilitate police monitoring, and where people have numbers, not names. Trouble arises

when D-503, a complacent rocket engineer, meets the enticing I-330.

**The Progressive Revolution** by Michael Lux. If you've been embarrassed to be called a liberal in recent years, this brisk walk-through of the brighter spots in American history will restore your pride.

**The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie** by Alan Bradley. A hilarious mystery set in post-World War II England starring Flavia, an 11-year-old cynic who uses her grandfather's chemistry lab to find the culprit.

**I'd Rather We Got Casinos and Other Black Thoughts** by Larry Wilmore. The Daily Show's Senior Black Correspondent explains why the word 'chocolate' should replace 'African-American,' why only white people see UFOs, and why black weathermen make him feel happy (when they don't make him feel sad).

**Nobody Move** by Denis Johnson. Leaving Joseph Conrad for Raymond Chandler, the former Iowa Citian revels in large amounts of money changing hands, shootings galore, and characters so nasty you don't even want to have sex with them. Funny, tough, and decidedly not uplifting.

*Summer Reading List 2009*  
Continued on Page 5

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# The Safety of the Officer Comes First

At the very end of his press conference on health care, widely regarded as a disaster, President Obama reminded us all of why his presidency is a historic step forward for America. Can you imagine John McCain or Hillary Clinton condemning a police officer, any police officer, for acting “stupidly?” For that matter, can you imagine Iowa Governor Chet Culver, or Iowa City Mayor Regenia Bailey, speaking out in that way, guaranteeing a storm of criticism and a fall in their approval ratings? For American public officials, police officers are normally beyond criticism.

Obama has been forced to backtrack on this statement, but no one believes that he does not think that the police officer in question behaved “stupidly.” The police officer, with the support of his union, has spoken up in his own defense, claiming that he was acting according to the highest standards of police professionalism. Both President Obama and officer are right. The public debate has revolved around the issue of racial profiling by the police, but there are two important issues that collide in this debate: race and police professionalism.

Police departments around the country use the slogan “to serve and to protect”, and most people assume that the people who are to be served and protected are citizens. In the course of police training, though, there are other principles instilled in aspiring officers, notably the mantra of modern policing: “the safety of the officer comes first.” When Iowa City artist Eric Shaw was shot down in cold blood by an Iowa City police officer, he was holding a phone in his hand. The officer mistakenly thought it was a gun, but his response was in keeping with the training he had received. According to the Johnson County Attorney, the officer committed no crime in shooting down an innocent citizen as long as he was acting in good faith to preserve his own safety, and the safety of other officers on the scene.

Given the standards of American

police professionalism, it is impossible to conceive of a police force without firearms. The University of Iowa conducted an experiment with an unarmed police force for nearly forty years, from the late 1960s until last year. Although Iowa was the only major American university with an unarmed security force, the experiment was a complete success, satisfactory to faculty, staff, and students, until the head of the university police began to complain.

When Chuck Green was hired to head the university police, he reassured the administration that he was committed to maintaining an unarmed police force. But what is a professional police administrator to do, when the highest standards of police professionalism demand the use of lethal force in order to maintain the safety of his officers?

Green first came to the administration and faculty requesting the use of tasers, claiming that they were a substitute for firearms. When these were approved by the administration and faculty, Green then came forward with a proposal to arm the police. The fact that the people who are meant to be served and protected had been satisfied with an unarmed police department gave way to the irresistible argument that a major, modern university had no choice but to conform to the highest standards of professionalism.

The use of tasers by the police raises a closely related aspect of police training. How does one put the safety of the officer first at all times? In every encounter with the public, the first priority is maintaining complete control of the situation. According to that professional principle, from an officer’s point of view any refusal to comply with an order, even an illegal order, could constitute a threat to the safety of the officer, or other officers on the scene. Tasers are not a substitute for firearms in most cases, but a substitute for conversation and handcuffs. They are an instrument to enforce a demand for total deference, courtesy, and coopera-

tion on the part of those taken into police custody.

It was a collision between the demands of police professionalism for full compliance and the racism endemic in American life that led to the situation condemned by President Obama. The fact that African-Americans are disproportionately victimized by the police--taken into custody, arrested, charged with crimes, incarcerated--is beyond dispute. Although white people are largely in denial about this, even conservative African-Americans know that it is true. That is one of the reasons why African-Americans are more likely than white people to become angry with the police, run afoul of the standards of police professionalism, and find themselves handcuffed, tasered, or jailed.

It is not only African-Americans who are victimized by the highest standards of police professionalism. The sky high arrest rates for undergraduates at the University of Iowa, where at last count 17% of students receiving a degree had a criminal record, are in large part a consequence of a failure of students to show due deference to the police. The police defend arrest rates for public intoxication that are out of line with other universities by claiming that they rarely arrest anyone for public intoxication alone, but for public intoxication along with another offense. The other offense, though, is normally a failure by a drunk to fully comply with police instructions.

Defenders of the police officer condemned by President Obama point out that he had been through extensive racial sensitivity training. That misses the point. Racially charged incidents will continue when the police are trained to link the safety of the officer with maintaining full control of every situation, leading to overreactions (i.e. behaving “stupidly”) when citizens fail to comply in every detail. As long as those standards of police professionalism are in place, more training for the police will only make things worse. ✂

— Jeff Cox

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# Reflections of an aging radical

January 10, 2009, was the 20-year anniversary of my first electoral win. This democratic socialist feminist victory was a shock, a scare, and a threat for some. For others, it was the first time they had ever voted for someone who had won. For me, it meant being sworn in immediately, making multi-million-dollar budget decisions within days.

This anniversary created an opportunity for reflection. I have a tattered envelope entitled, "The Progressive Years." I think of this as the two-year period between 1993 and 1995 when I served the community alongside Bruno Piggott and Jim Throgmorton. The envelope helps me remember why so many people invested time and money in local campaigns for me and my progressive colleagues. Here are some of the progressive changes that took place during The Progressive Years.

**Public Discussion:** We decided that the public's business should be higher on the agenda, so we changed the resolution outlining meeting rhythms by placing public discussion before planning and zoning issues instead of after. The change meant that developers and their attorneys did the waiting, not everyday citizens. We can thank Bruno Piggott for this shift in public process; it makes a big difference to those wanting to participate in local government in time to put their kids to bed.

**Historic Preservation and Conservation:** This was not about what color people paint their houses. It was about insuring that all flavors of Iowa City history are preserved, re-used, and incorporated into contemporary life. This ordinance allowed neighborhoods to petition to be an historic or conservation area.

**Sensitive Areas Ordinance (SAO):** The SAO evolved from a proposed "Save the Trees" ordinance. Mike Hodge wanted to redevelop an infill piece of property. He promised to save the trees in the back yard. This was said at a formal public meeting. I took it as a handshake, a solid commitment.

Two days later, many of the trees were down. I vowed that any such future agreements would be legally binding. Bruce Glasgow came to the council for a development on the corner of Scott and Court. On this land was a grove of burr oak trees that were 160 years old -- adolescence for this species. I kept asking to include maintaining the trees as part of a conditional zoning agreement. At one meeting, I heard a booming voice from the back of the room: "Kubby, I'll sign anything you want!." Glasgow had agreed to save those trees. Of course, it was in his economic interest to do so, as it made those lots more valuable. A pair

**"An engaged community reinforces the natural instincts of elected progressives."**

of owls continues to nest in those trees, and the Raptor Center brings abandoned fledglings there to be raised by them. After this, there was much pressure and work to develop a more broad-based ordinance to protect a variety of sensitive areas including wetlands, ravines, steep slopes, and prairies, as well as tree groves. The ordinance is not perfect, yet it showed the value of these natural areas in our community and has made a difference. Ten years later, the Johnson County Board of Supervisors passed a similar ordinance that covers sensitive areas in the unincorporated areas of Johnson County.

Another progressive aspect of the SAO is the process by which this ordinance was formulated. The city brought together developers, environmentalists, and others to talk about how to structure

such an ordinance. The stakeholders on various sides of the table weren't used to working together, yet came up with something that was both visionary and practical.

**Gender Identity:** A woman approached me about discrimination she faced in the workplace on the basis of gender identity. Our ordinance did not recognize this form of discrimination. She wanted to set things right. She presented her story to the council, who directed the Human Rights Commission to draft an updated ordinance. The update passed 7-0, although it would have been in jeopardy with the next council. Over ten years later, Johnson County and the State of Iowa included gender identity as a protected class.

**Economic Development Guidelines:** The city created guidelines that entities would have to abide by when requesting public assistance in the area of economic development. Expectations about wages and benefits, environmental issues, and energy efficiency were outlined. The downfall of these efforts is that the guidelines remain only guidelines, not regulatory expectations.

These are just a few of the larger areas where progressive impact was made. Local government vision and action can be seen as a role model for other levels of government. An engaged community reinforces the natural instincts of elected progressives.

So, next time you are being an armchair policy maker, think about how you might get off your ass and outside of your head. Go speak at a public hearing, write that email to provide input, apply to serve on a local commission, or petition to get your name on a ballot. Progressives need to stop talking about how the world should be and starting putting our hats in the ring to actively engage in how the world will be.

We have much to offer. Let's get to work. ✂

— Karen Kubby ran twice for the Iowa City City Council before winning her first election.

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# Summertime Murmur

It was about a year ago that someone in the upper echelons of the Iowa City Community School District whispered in my ear, “we’re gonna close Roosevelt.” I remember being rather taken aback by this casual summertime murmur. As a former ICCSD board member and president, my mind flooded with questions.

1. Why were they closing an elementary school, especially one near the heart of downtown, when enrollment was steadily increasing and projected to continue to do so?

2. Where was this certainty coming from: how was this person so sure of this decision in the absence of public discussion? How would they deal with all the complex social, emotional, and logistical issues surrounding such a momentous decision, especially one that appeared to have been made in a back room, rather than, as Iowa law encourages, in the sunshine?

3. And the most perplexing to me: why Roosevelt? During my six years on the board, we’d talked about school closings but Roosevelt was never mentioned. Because it felt personal, this question irked me the most.

Roosevelt was my kids’ school. I was a champion of its complicated multi-racial, multi-ethnic student body. Like many in this school community, we liked the mix – kids and families from all over the map, literally and figuratively. To my mind, mixing it up with all kinds of people – now that’s an education! But I also knew that Roosevelt would never have the clout to defend itself the way the richer more powerful schools in the district could, and that is one of the reasons – for better or worse – that I ran for the board. So it was with a twinge of discomfort that I noted the confluence of my absence from the board and the closing of Roosevelt.

That twinge reignited a concern I’ve harbored about a dirty little secret of school board governance, namely that people who serve on school boards with

children enrolled in the district have an inherent conflict of interest. If the charge of a school board is oversight of the entire district and the good of the whole over the interests of the few, it is the rare parent who will subjugate their children’s interests for someone else’s. Test it out: can you imagine a school board member willingly voting yes for a decision that would distress their kids and inconvenience them as parents? Clearly people have used this loophole to their advantage: get on the board to either protect the status quo or advocate for a change that would be to your benefit.

**“Courage is not revered in the climate of the board committee.”**

The make-up of a school board should, ideally, reflect the values of the community it represents. Closing Roosevelt (for reasons the board still can’t fully explain) does not feel like a reflection of a town that considers itself well-educated and socially progressive. Where were the voices of the urban planners warning against sprawl? And where in the decision making-process were the voices of historic preservationists and environmentalists and neighborhood associations?

Once the board did make public the administration’s “recommendation” to close Roosevelt, all these voices showed up in droves, filling the board room meeting after meeting. They spent hundreds of hours surveying the community and building a compelling set of reasons to save Roosevelt based on energy studies, engineering, demographics, socio-economics, community values, and most importantly, the board’s own parameters for decision-making. They asked the board to at least uncouple the closing of

Roosevelt with the decision to build a new school west of town. The final vote was 7-0. Not a single board member was willing to be swayed by the vociferous and intelligent community it was elected to represent.

At the end of the day it’s the same old story. Developer buys land on the outskirts of town. Developer develops land but can’t sell houses without promising a school. School district can’t handle operating costs of new school and older ones in need of upgrades, and so abandons the storied, historic, layered old in favor of the characterless suburban new. Do this a few times and it’s so long, livable city.

I often wonder what it is that gets hold of fair, open-minded, often progressive people once they join a school board. How quickly it’s forgotten that the board’s job is to lead the superintendent and not the other way around! But I do remember that courage is not revered in the climate of the board committee; conformity is. The complexities of school finance formulas in conjunction with the steep learning curve of other issues conspire to intimidate rather than embolden. People fall in line. I often did myself. The board is full of well-meaning people with kids in the district. None of them attend Roosevelt. ❀

— *Lauren Reece is a former President of the Iowa City Community School District Board*



Aug 4, 1964

Bodies of civil rights workers  
Chaney, Goodman, & Schwerner  
found

Aug 7-8

Hardacre Film Fest,  
Hardacre Theatre, Tipton

Aug 9, 1989

Pres. Bush signed \$166B S&L  
bailout

Aug 20, 1619

20 Africans arrived in Jamestown  
– the first slaves in America

Sept 3, 1929

US stock market hit a new high

Sept 8, 1974

Nixon pardoned by Ford

Sept 12

Iowa Women's Music Festival  
City Park, Iowa City

Sept 13

Harkin Steak Fry  
Indianola

Sept 17

US Constitution Day

Oct 1, 1949

Steelworkers went on strike for  
better pensions

Oct 11, 1884

Eleanor Roosevelt born

Oct 14, 1964

Martin Luther King, Jr. awarded  
the Nobel Peace Prize

**Summer Reading List 2009**  
*Continued from Page 1*

**Satchel: The Life and Times of an American Legend** by Larry Tye. One of the best sports biographies ever, about the greatest philosopher-athlete ever. "You win a few, you lose a few. Some get rained out. But you got to dress for all of them."

**Firmin** by Sam Savage. Born in a half-eaten copy of Finnegans Wake, a very bright rat wants only to discuss literature with his bookseller landlord who tries to poison him.

**Among Other Things, I've Taken Up Smoking** by Aoibheann Sweeney. Searching for her parents in Manhattan, a young woman from Maine instead discovers cosmetics, people who drink lots of coffee, her own sexuality, possibly her father's, and how life surprises us just when we think we've figured something out. ✂

— *Prairie Dog, with thanks to  
Prairie Mouse and Prairie Alien*

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**"No idea can  
be considered  
valuable until  
a thousand  
people have  
laughed at it."**

— *Lao Tzu*

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# Strangely Silent

On May 17 the Des Moines Register broke the story that in 2008 the FBI infiltrated an Iowa City peace group that was planning civil disobedience at the Republican National Convention in Minneapolis.

Two days later I went to our City Council meeting and urged them to pass a resolution condemning the FBI for its actions. One council member, Mike Wright, has been trying to get the council to act. Iowa City Mayor Regenia Bailey told me that she would be in favor of a letter, not a resolution. Now, two months later, the council is waiting to read the Freedom of Information Act file requested by one of the members of the peace group before they proceed.

The Johnson County Democratic Party central committee overwhelmingly passed a resolution asking the council to write this letter to the FBI. Our more mainstream local peace groups have

been strangely silent. The community at large has also been strangely silent. No one else has come to the council meetings to bring up the subject. There have been almost no letters to the editor in our local newspapers (possibly because it has received scant coverage), and very few letters to council members.

Maybe this inaction is due to the fact that most people respond like our Mayor, who was quoted in an excellent article (July 2009) of the national magazine *The Progressive*: "Yeah it's surprising, but is it surprising? It's been happening for years." I think that's the prevailing view of the politically "liberal" citizens here. Iowa City has a long history of anti-war activity. We helped launch Barack Obama in the Iowa Caucus in January 2008, and voted 70% for him in November. But as we activists get older, it's becoming harder and harder to find people who are outraged enough about anything that hap-

pens locally--after eight years of Bush--to write even a two-sentence letter to the editor or the City Council.

There is still time. The council has not decided whether to pursue this. Write:

council@iowa-city.org;  
opinion@press-citizen.com;  
editorial@gazettecommunications.com

— Gary Sanders lives in Iowa City

## THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

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