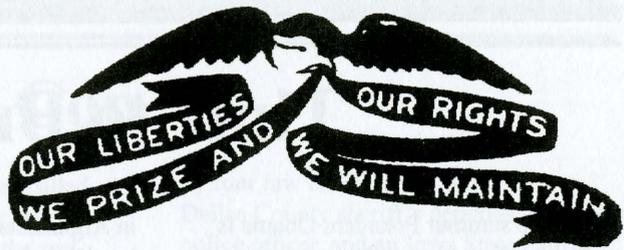


# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



August 2010

## A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

### Big Government in a Small Town

*"When you touch the hand of a CCC boy, you touch the hand of America."*

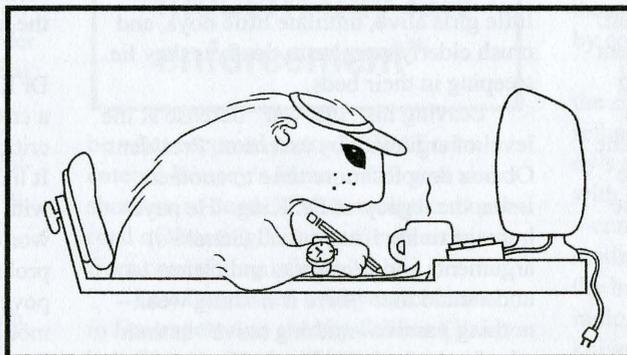
Keosauqua, Iowa, lies in the center of Van Buren County, about fifteen minutes from the Missouri border. The Des Moines River winds between the town and the 1600-acre Lacey-Keosauqua State Park.

Keosauqua is not known for its progressive politics, but on July 31 it was the scene of a remarkable event. 300 people gathered at the state park for the dedication of the first statue in Iowa to honor Civilian Conservation Corps workers, the young men who drove the single greatest conservation effort in American history.

With unemployment today near 10% and taking a tremendous toll on families across the country, it's hard to imagine the magnitude of suffering when 25% of Americans were jobless in the early 1930s. It's equally hard to imagine a government stimulus program like the CCC being enacted in today's political climate, when every effort to aid the unemployed and stimulate the economy is maligned as wasteful, socialist, or jammed-down-our-throats. (Somehow, most unimaginably of all, the first CCC worker was inducted only 37 days after FDR's inauguration).

Similar anti-government sentiments were voiced when the first CCC camp in Iowa was established in Keosauqua in 1933. Iowa had wisely created a long-range conservation plan earlier that year, so it was near the front of the line for

approval of a CCC program. Anti-government griping gradually diminished as two major goals were achieved: conservation of natural resources, and jobs for young American men in their early twenties, many of whom today would be called homeless). Hundreds of thousands of "CCC boys" built lodges, created trails, planted trees, and maintained parks endangered by erosion. By the time the



program ended in 1941, 46,000 young men in Iowa alone had worked in communities like Keosauqua.

So perhaps it was not that remarkable for so many local residents to celebrate the legacy of one of the jewels of Roosevelt's New Deal. Speaker after speaker extolled the beautiful park and its new statue of a symbolic CCC boy. Stories were told of the boys themselves, who were embraced by the town as their own. And several CCC workers, now in their late eighties and early nineties, spoke of their pride in doing meaningful work when no other prospects existed.

In Van Buren County, registered Republicans outnumber Democrats nearly 2-1. Barack Obama finished third there

in the 2008 caucuses. In the general election, it was the worst county in the 2nd Congressional District for both Obama and Dave Loebsack. But at the dedication of the CCC statue in Keosauqua, not a word was uttered against Big Government.

The concept of Roosevelt's "peacetime army" lives on as AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps), a full-time, team-based residential program for men and women of ages 18-24. Vinton, Iowa, is home to one of five national campuses, maintaining the state's tradition of supporting national service programs in partnership with local communities.

One program modeled on the CCC was not so successful. In 1984, Congress created the American Conservation Corps, but President Reagan vetoed the bill. Ironically, Reagan's father had been the head of a similar federal agency, the Work Projects Administration, in Dixon, Illinois, in the 1930s. "A lot of people remember it as a boondoggle," said Reagan, "but I can take you to our town and show you things, like a riverfront that I used to hike through once that was swamp and is now a beautiful park-like place built by WPA."

Want more irony? The property owners around Lake Delhi on the Maquoketa River voted years ago to keep their lakeside private, thereby avoiding government regulations and taxes. The

*Big Government  
Continued on Page 5*

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# Time to Break the Silence

This summer President Obama is sending several thousand citizen soldiers from Iowa to fight in Afghanistan. These National Guard troops are not professional military men and women, but Iowans uprooted from their jobs and families. Many of them share the ambivalence felt by most Americans about this war, which at last count was opposed by 62% of the American people.

For a President to send citizen soldiers into a war that lacks public support is a momentous act. As any number of Viet Nam veterans can tell you, lack of public support for a war is intensely demoralizing for soldiers. It is particularly important in President Obama's case to pay attention to what he says about this war, since his presidency is under partisan attack by a Tea Party crowd who will apparently say anything in order to undermine his legitimacy as a president. President Obama's greatest achievement so far has been to get elected, carrying three former Confederate states in the process, and it is important to defend the legitimacy of that achievement. There are many Americans who will never be reconciled to the sight of an African-American in the White House.

That does not mean, though, that President Obama's policies should be exempt from scrutiny merely because he is under attack from partisan racists. At some point it is necessary to heed the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, who in 1967 delivered a famous speech at Riverside Church in New York entitled "A Time to Break the Silence". For Dr. King this represented an extremely painful break with President Lyndon Johnson, a person did more than anyone else to end the evil of racial segregation in the South. The issue was war, and Dr. King's words were: "A time comes when silence is betrayal."

In his 2009 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in Oslo, President Obama acknowledged (to "laughter") the irony of receiving the prize just after he had ordered a massive expansion of the war

in Afghanistan. The war in Afghanistan, he claimed, was a "just war," which he defined as a war that (1) is fought as a last resort, (2) is proportional to the ends desired, and (3) protects civilians to the greatest possible extent.

President Obama does not bother to elaborate on or explain his three-point defense of a "just war." On the face of it, the Afghan war is certainly not a last resort, and is massively disproportionate in its relationship between means and ends. Because it is a guerrilla war against irregular troops it involves systematic attacks on civilians. The people who launch and guide President Obama's drones from the air conditioned comfort of Creech Air Force Base in Nevada watch on screens while entire households in both Afghanistan and Pakistan are blown up by Hellfire missiles that burn little girls alive, mutilate little boys, and crush elderly couples to death as they lie sleeping in their beds.

Leaving his "just war" defense at the level of argument by assertion, President Obama devotes more time to another issue, the legacy of Dr. King. He pays homage to Dr. King's (and Gandhi's) arguments and life work, and claims to understand that "there is nothing weak--nothing passive--nothing naive" in their advocacy of non violence. He then goes on to throw Dr. King overboard precisely on the grounds that his life and creed are useless to a "head of state sworn to protect and defend their nation. I cannot be guided by their lives alone."

President Obama then goes even further, not only defending the war in Afghanistan as "just," but revealing the true basis for that war, which is not about defending American lives and American freedom. It is an instrument in America's drive for regional diplomatic and military domination in the Middle East and central Asia. America, he claims, has "helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms." Finally, he asserts that America's drive for global

geo-political domination must be collaborative, must respect human rights, and must be about the promotion of democracy and freedom everywhere in the world.

In his Oslo speech President Obama has dismissed Dr. King as naive and misguided, and taken the side of Lyndon Johnson, who also believed that America was fighting a guerrilla war with heavy civilian casualties in the interests of freedom and democracy. President Obama has outlined a new version of the Truman Doctrine of 1947, which committed America to global intervention any time and any place an American President deems it to be in America's national interest. The pretext for interventionism has changed. Instead of defending freedom by fighting wars against Communism, are now entitled to invade and occupy any foreign country anywhere in the world in the name of human rights.

As President Obama recognizes, Dr King's 1967 speech was not merely a critique of the war in Viet Nam, but a critique of American global militarism. It linked the American warfare state, with its hundreds of bases around the world, with our inability to deal with the problems of unemployment, racism, and poverty at home. The Obama campaign mobilized young Americans who hoped that we would have a President committed to peace, jobs, and "healthcare for all" rather than war. That hope was officially declared dead by the President in Oslo.

The soldiers who returned from Viet Nam figured out eventually that they were being lied to by their President when he claimed that they were fighting for American freedom. The same thing will happen to those patriotic and conscientious citizen soldiers of Iowa who are fortunate enough to return from Afghanistan. ✂

— Jeff Cox

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# Suicide by Cop

**G**ary Gilmore is infamous for being the first victim of state-sanctioned murder (capital punishment) after the U.S. Supreme Court gave its constitutional approval to newly adopted death penalty statutes in 1976 under *Gregg v. Georgia*. The new series of statutes was necessary because the same Court had determined four years earlier that all states' death penalty laws became unconstitutional when it handed down *Furman v. Georgia*.

In a *Playboy* interview, prior to his execution in 1977, Gilmore told of how he had wanted to commit suicide, but that he was too cowardly to follow through. So he devised a plan. Let the state end his life. Although Gilmore was from Oregon, he entered the state of Utah, which had the firing squad as a means of execution. (A 2004 legislative change removed the firing squad as a means of execution, but it remained available to those still on death row. Ronnie Lee Gardner's murder by the state this past June may have been the final firing squad death in Utah). Gilmore held up a convenience store in Utah and killed an employee, and the following night he killed a motel employee after robbing him. Both men complied with Gilmore's demands, but he shot them anyway. He was quickly tried in the motel murder and sentenced to death. He demanded that the state carry out its duty to shoot him without delay. Gilmore gave up all appeals and voluntarily committed himself to the mercy of five marksmen police officers.

Gilmore started something that has escalated over the years. As far as I know, this was the first recorded incident of "suicide by cop." Since Gilmore, however, most individuals opting to die by the hand of law enforcement have chosen a more direct route than Gilmore's. Today's perps have a simpler means of putting an end to the lives they despise. Employ street cops, a SWAT team, or a posse of several law enforcement entities to terminate their lives in the convenience of their own home, any chosen street, or other suitable location.

This past May police were called to a residence in Ogden, Iowa, after a neighbor accused the man in the residence of making harassing phone calls. When police arrived at the residence in question, the accused answered the door with a handgun. The reactive police force went into panic mode and cordoned off the house, evacuated neighbors, and after a ceremonial waiting period, entered the house.

"Randall D. Kimsey, 50, had been suicidal in the past and authorities were worried that he had taken prescription drugs." The standard operating procedure for a suicidal citizen appears to

**"Shoot to kill is  
the mantra of  
modern-day law  
enforcement"**

be what occurred next. A SWAT team entered Kimsey's home in full gear and shot him to death. Police took the moral road of shooting Kimsey to protect him from committing suicide.

Last December, a 54-year-old man in Davenport was shot by Officer Elizabeth Tharp when he didn't drop a knife after the officer ordered him to do so. He had a history of mental problems. It's sad and strange that with all the "tools" that law enforcement lobbies to acquire (stun guns, Mace, etc.), bullets remain the most popular hammer in the box.

Back in 2005 Jonathan McCourt, 47, was shot outside the Polk County Courthouse by a Polk County sheriff's deputy after he vandalized his own pickup truck with spray paint, hopped up onto the truck, began a tirade of profanities, and whipped out a toy gun. McCourt had a mental disorder and had not taken his medication.

Unfortunately, the stories continue. "Melvin Nagle, 57 was shot to death

by four law enforcement officers – two Dallas County sheriff's deputies, an Adel police officer, and an Iowa State Patrol officer . . . after he refused to comply with commands to put down his gun." The shooting was justified.

But this is the most disturbing: On January 29, 2004, "Des Moines police fatally shot Ricky Garcia Jr., 20, during a downtown gun battle. Garcia got out of his car and fired several rounds from a handgun before officers opened fire, hitting him 29 times. A grand jury cleared the officers." 29 times!

These stories and many more like them present a pattern. None of the victims of the police homicides were shot with the intent to wound. Shoot to kill is the mantra of modern-day law enforcement. But most law enforcement agencies in the U.S. will deny that there is any such training. In any case, most of these incidents are predictable -- suicide by cop.

Gone are the days of Andy Griffith, the small town sheriff of Mayberry who refused to wear a weapon. Although Andy's a fictional character, what is wrong with his approach to solving problems – communication and patience? Today's modern police officer has a Glock in the holster, mace, flashlight, handcuffs, radio, tactical gloves, ammo, combat knives, and batons. SWAT teams are not afraid to use those "tools" when communication breaks down. It's too bad that patience is not strapped to that utility belt as well.

I've heard of fucking for virginity and going to war for peace. What's next? Killing people to protect them? ❧

— Marty Ryan is an equal partner  
in Fawkes-Lee & Ryan, a public  
policy advocacy group.  
[www.iowappa.com](http://www.iowappa.com)

# Historic Preservation and Sustainability

When I tell people I've just spent two years working towards a degree in Historic Preservation, I am often met with blank faces or questions like "What's Historic Preservation?" or "What can you do with a degree in such an obscure field?"

The truth of the matter is that anybody with a progressive mind-set cares about preservation. They just haven't labeled their concern. Do you buy locally? Do you care about Iowa's farmers? Do you try to shop downtown instead of at Coral Ridge Mall? What about re-creating a healthy environment for our state's prairie wildlife? If so, then you are an advocate for preservation. These concerns all fall under the umbrella of Historic Preservation. And it is my job as a preservation professional to locate and advocate for those issues within a broader context.

Historic Preservation is often presented as an elitist approach to protect wealthy communities or to facilitate gentrification. Historic Preservation, though, benefits everybody. I find the best way to explain is to put it into

a local context. In Iowa, that means farms. We are all fiercely proud of our 'heartland' status. But unless we start to recognize the ways in which sprawl and big agriculture threaten our landscape, we'll lose it.

The current most important preservation question for this region, then, is how we should move forward in managing growing urban areas in a way that fosters existing community and does not threaten the surrounding rural environment. Rural Iowa needs to maintain a sustainable economic base in a way that does not degrade our environment. In turn, urban centers need to place a higher value on existing building stock. We need to change the way we use and value our existing built environment, both urban and rural, by refocusing the development and building industries. Smart Growth and LEED initiatives are good programs that make people think about our environment, but they have inherent long-term flaws, due to the fact that they emerged to facilitate new development.

Simply put, we cannot disregard the resources that are already available to us.

Policy focused on maintaining density in Iowa City's historic neighborhoods will re-direct building away from outlying areas, therefore preserving rural land for traditional agricultural uses. Yet the incentive to enact change through legislation depends on public opinion. So while preservationists must concern themselves with creating and presenting a persuasive argument, we can't disregard the impact local activists and elected officials have on our field. If professional preservationists would recognize what I believe is a natural alliance with the growing sustainability movement in the US, then more people would grasp the ways in which preservation impacts all our well-being.

It is my hope that the emerging generation of preservationists will embrace this new direction and thereby expand our field, by helping to overcome public suspicion that Historic Preservation is inherently elitist. ✂

— Iowa native Flossie Cox is completing her degree in Historic Preservation at Columbia University

**"The Internet and the microprocessor, which were very fundamental to Microsoft being able to take the magic of software and having the PC explode, were among many of the elements that came through government research and development."**

**— Bill Gates**

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# CALENDAR

Aug 6 and 9, 1945  
US dropped atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing 240,000 civilians

Aug 9, 1932  
Strike by Iowa farmers

Aug 21, 2017  
Solar eclipse to cross the US from northwest to southeast

Aug 22  
Suicide Prevention Walk  
5:30, City Park, Iowa City

Aug 28, 1955  
Emmett Till lynched in Mississippi

Sept 6, 1860  
Jane Addams born

Sept. 23  
First day to vote in Iowa

Sept 26, 1960  
First televised presidential debate

Oct 2, 1800  
Nat Turner born

Oct 2, 1985  
Rock Hudson died of AIDS

Oct 3, 1965  
Immigration Reform Act abolished national quotas

Oct 23, 1775  
Continental Congress passed a resolution barring Blacks from the Continental Army

Oct 29, 1945  
Ballpoint pen went on sale

Nov 1  
Last day to vote early

Nov 2, 1920  
Eugene Debs received over 900,000 votes for President while in prison

## Big Government Continued from Page 1

Delaware County Board of Supervisors declined to enroll in the national flood insurance program, presumably to avoid the heavy hand of government. Now the private association that opposed incorporation as a municipality is seeking taxpayer money to restore the lake. The claim that restoration is in the public interest provoked Iowa State University economist David Swenson to ask, "Lake what?"

There's still time this summer for an in-state vacation getaway. Visit Lacey-Keosauqua State Park, enjoy one of Iowa's scenic treasures, and chat with the good people of Van Buren County about the legacy of the CCC boys. ✨

— *Prairie Dog*

**“ Capitalism needs and must have the prison to protect itself from the criminals it has created.”**

— Eugene Debs, 1907

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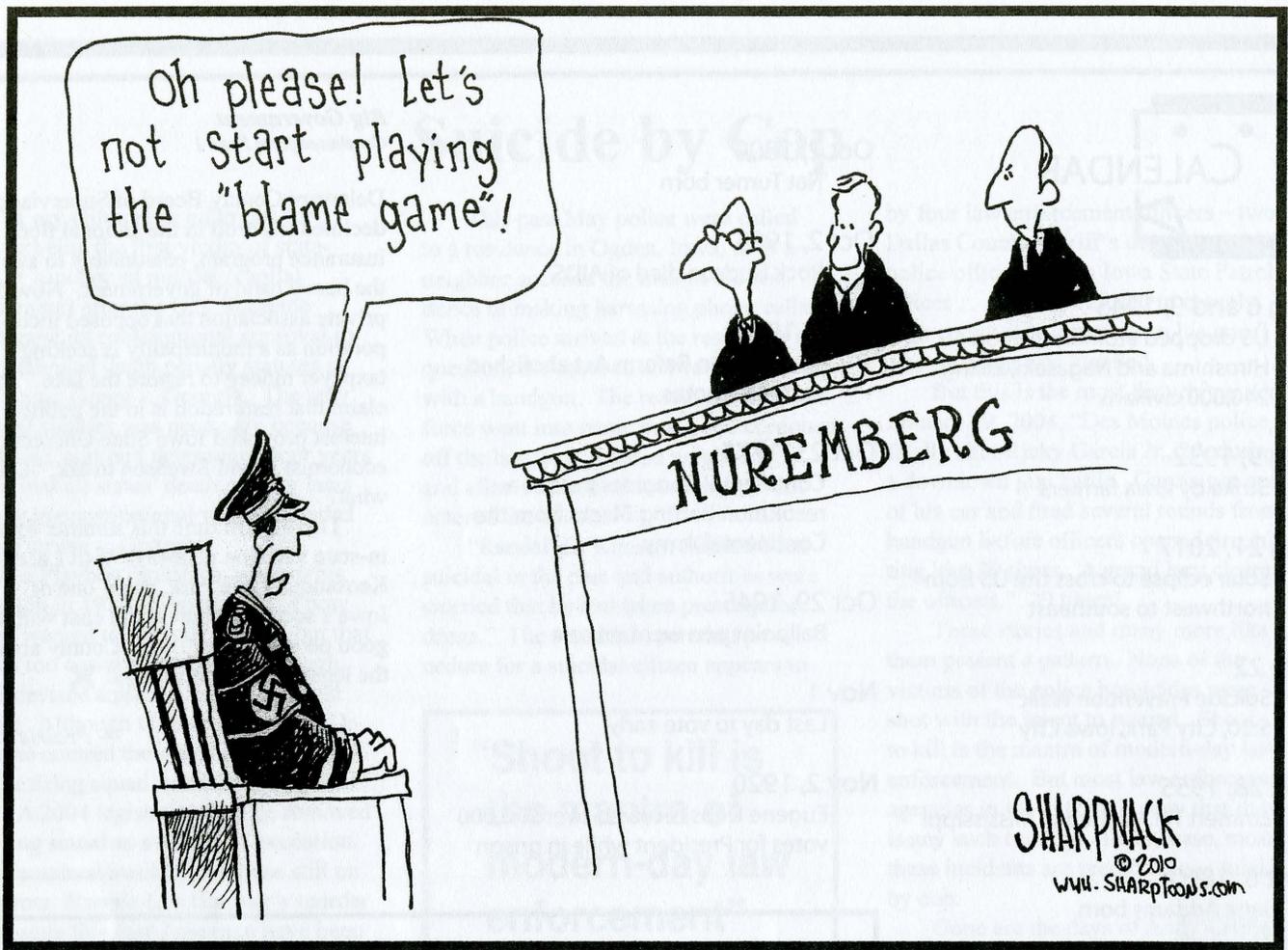
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