

# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



Summer 2016

---

A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

---

## Amusing Ourselves to Death: Prairie Dog's Summer Reading List

### **Extreme Prey** by John Sanford

Lucas Davenport is on the campaign trail during the caucus season, not as a candidate but as a private detective monitoring some unusual rumors and suspicious activities in the precincts of Iowa. Politics as usual, or something more sinister?

### **Alive: New and Selected Poems**

by Elizabeth Willis

One of Iowa City's finest poets writes deceptively simple, polished meditations that earned her selection as a Pulitzer Prize finalist for 2016. "The poet is a trespasser."

### **The Story of My Teeth**

by Valeria Luiselli

Possibly the greatest dental novel ever, in the surreal but earthy tradition of Cervantes and Marquez. Prairie Dog predicts that Luiselli, born in Mexico and raised in South Africa, will someday win a Nobel.

### **Quixote** by Ilan Stavans

Speaking of Cervantes, his epic Don Quixote is now 400 years old, and nearly that many years ahead of its time. Stavans crafts an air-tight case for the saga of Quixote and Sancho Panza as the best, not just the first, novel of all time.

### **Shakespeare's Money: How Much Did He Make and What Did This Mean?** By Robert Bearman

Another 400-year anniversary rolls around (watch for an exhibit of the First Folio at the University of Iowa this fall). Shakespeare, according to Bearman, was just another hack trying to support his family, although he did turn a nice phrase occasionally.

### **Nothing Ever Dies**

by Vietnam Thanh Nguyen

Nguyen examines the Forever War through the prism of popular movies, literature, and art, while reflecting on memory and its distortions. How do we remember wars? How *should* we remember them?

### **We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War** by Doug Bradley and Craig Werner

Hendrix, Aretha, Dylan, Creedence, Merle Haggard – all were as popular on the Vietnam battlefield as on the American home front. Soldiers sometimes gleaned different meanings from the same songs, but the music helped them tolerate combat, and often brought together urban and rural, black and white, and even pro-and anti-war troops.

### **West of the Revolution: An Uncommon History of 1776**

by Claudio Sant

Sure, a lot was happening on the east coast, but what about the rest of the continent? Russia and Spain were running wild along the coast of California, Lakota Sioux roamed the Black Hills, France and England were attempting to divide and rule the land on either side of the Mississippi, and beavers were performing ecological engineering miracles throughout North America. Sant's fascinating depiction of a world in spectacular upheaval brings together market forces, climate change, and struggles for freedom – a world much like today's.

### **Girl Waits with Gun** by Amy Stewart

Three sisters become armed Sheriff's deputies in rural New Jersey a century ago. No profanity, no violence, barely any crime – the ideal historical novel for sensitive mystery-lovers.

### **One Kick** by Chelsea Cain

Girl waits with gun, chainsaw, and bondage cuffs. Iowa native Cain delivers another not-for-the-faint-hearted thriller.

Continued on Page 6

---

# How the Iowa Caucuses Were Rigged

The Iowa caucuses were rigged against Bernie Sanders. The Iowa Democratic Party did not purposefully rig them against him; the rules were put into place before anyone knew he was planning to run. They were rigged, though, against anyone who ran a campaign like Bernie Sanders, one that mobilized thousands of new voters and brought them into the party. One would think that such a campaign would be welcomed by the Democratic Party establishment in Iowa, including our state legislators and state party officials, but in fact such a campaign would threaten their control of the state party. They would apparently prefer to preside over an unpopular party that is in danger of becoming a minority at every level of government, handing the state of Iowa entirely over to the Republicans.

The caucus was rigged by giving disproportionate numbers of delegates to those precincts with a past record of voting Democratic, i.e. by casting votes for candidates of the current party establishment. When the party reported caucus returns, they did not report the number of caucus attenders, but the number of "delegate equivalents" in the precinct. Precincts that had disproportionate numbers of relatively elderly Democrats with a record of voting in partisan elections were given more delegates than precincts with many new caucus attenders but historically low levels of voter turnout.

This skewed the results in favor of Hillary Clinton, who did well in precincts that had historically high levels of Democratic turnout and which as a consequence had more delegates. Most caucus attenders assumed that everyone's vote for a delegate had equal weight across the state and would be reflected in the "delegate

equivalent" count, but that is untrue. The principle, fundamental to a democracy, of "one person one vote" was fundamentally undermined by the rigged delegate selection rules. Put in the simplest terms, a vote for Hillary Clinton was worth more than a vote for Bernie Sanders.

That's why Hillary Clinton was declared the "winner" of the Iowa caucuses with a one quarter of one percent lead in the number of delegate equivalents. That is why, throughout the rest of the campaign, Iowa was put up on the maps on MSNBC and CNN as a "win" for Clinton, even though more caucus attenders supported Sanders than Clinton. In the normal sense of the word "win," Bernie Sanders was the winner in Iowa. That is why the party establishment is keeping the raw number of attenders a secret: to disguise the fact that they in practice rigged the caucuses against Sanders and for Clinton.

This can be illustrated by two caucuses that I am familiar with in Iowa City. The numbers here are rounded off, and do not include the initial number of attenders who supported a non-viable candidate or were uncommitted. One precinct, with a relatively stable population and a history of voting Democratic, was allocated eleven delegates to be divided proportionately between 306 Clinton supporters and 285 Sanders supporters—roughly 54 caucus attenders per delegate. In the other precinct, one with many transient residents and low voter turnout in past elections, 540 Sanders caucus attenders and 90 Clinton caucus attenders were allocated only 7 delegates among them. In that precinct it took 90 caucus attenders instead of 54 to achieve one delegate in the state party's "delegate equivalent" report-

ing. This is obviously undemocratic, or to put it another way, "rigged."

There are many other ways in which the Iowa presidential caucus is undemocratic and unfair, some of them forcefully pointed out by Hillary Clinton in 2008. It discriminates against those with child care responsibilities, or who work in the evening, or have mobility problems that prevent them from getting out in the winter. There are no absentee ballots. The caucus is no longer a friendly neighborhood chat among neighbors about who should be president, but a chaotic proceeding that the Democratic Party is entirely incapable of managing. It is fundamental to a democracy to have decision making procedures that are fair and transparent, but the Iowa caucuses have become chaotic because of a lack of trained staff. It is entirely implausible to argue now that the caucus attenders are counted accurately and the "delegate equivalents" selected accordingly. Even when they are selected accurately, the process is secretive and unfair.

Maintaining our "first in the nation status" is not an adequate justification for undemocratic procedures. Iowa should move to a primary even at the risk of losing our treasured status, and turn the procedures over to public officials who are accountable legally for conducting fair and honest elections. If we are to maintain the caucuses, the state party should at the very least ensure that the "delegate equivalent" numbers are directly proportional to the number of caucus attenders supporting each viable candidate, and that the number of attenders is reported to the public so that they can make up their minds about the fairness of the delegate selection process. ✂

—Jeff Cox

---

---

# Common Good

Last winter in a radio interview, Middle East analyst and journalist Robin Wright observed that although the Arab Spring had elicited in the West a celebration of the powers of organization for individual rights (and the use of social media to facilitate that organization), there seemed to be no subsequent organization among participating citizenry on behalf of the common good. Instead, subsequent governance in the nations that had seen massive movements for individual rights remained vexed and unstable and showed few signs of a dialogue about common good.

In the endless season of US campaigns, presidential and otherwise, when the organization for individual rights stays alive-- although not always well--with a significant assist from social media, will there come a time when the campaigning is over, when governance is the project? Can common good enter the struggles over individual rights and play a role in the fight for justice? "Common good," "rights," "justice": words high in the stratosphere, I know. But since I believe we need to anchor them to Earth, "common good" among them, I'm going to try to pull them down for a closer look.

I know that the criticism on the Left says that common good has meant a program of values and practices that serve the elite leaving many outside the benefits of a so-called good society. I not only concede that this has often been true but assert that it is a history that stinks to high heaven, that same stratosphere to which a value like common good has been relegated. But is this smell emanating from the idea of a common good or the abuse of the goal?

In a 17-year-old essay entitled "The Greater Common Good," Indian writer and activist Arundhati Roy tells the story of struggle over the Indian government's attempt to build a megadam on the Narmada River, the largest of a series of dams. Reading the essay and viewing a subsequent documentary by Franny Armstrong called *Drowned Out*, a person first thinks she is faced with the conundrum of deciding whether to cheer for the rights of the fisherfolk, destitute because their estuary on the coast has dried up and is in desperate need of a dam redirecting Narmada water, or for the rights of certain Adivasi, the indigenous subsistence farmers whose ancient riverside settlements will be at the bottom of a reservoir if the megadam is built. Which is the greater common good? Turns out this is the wrong, one could even say a dishonest, question. Roy and Armstrong both unfold a set of circumstances in which, first of all, outside analysis of the hydrology questions the government claims about how much water will be available for redistribution and whether it can be made to reach the fisherfolk, especially when it first passes by sites of industrial agriculture and major chemical and pharmaceutical manufacturing in a large city. And where is a realistic count of the people displaced by the dam or an environmental impact analysis?

All this is to say, long before we get to conversation about who should be sacrificing their livelihood or their lives for the greater common good, we should have an accurate evaluation of what is available to be shared and who all is sitting at each place expecting the resources to be passed their way. In order to be considered for a sacrifice, you first have to be

recognized as having a valuable life. And before anyone is talking sacrifice, let's first know what is knowable? (how much tax money due how many nations is hidden behind the backs of banks from the Caribbean to the Alps?)

I thought I was being clever imagining "common good" without the definite article "the." But it's a move communitarian scholar Amitai Etzioni made years ago. I can't speak for Professor Etzioni, but to me the removal of that "the" signals that the common good is mutable, subject to claims for rights we had failed to consider and for resources not always easy to count.

This doesn't mean there are no communities of affection, no common good. I'm persuaded by Etzioni that even the most strident advocate for individual rights is embedded in society. There is no coherent way of formulating individual rights or interest, Etzioni argues, abstracted from their social context. There is no point in attempting to derive a theory of justice from the principles that individuals would choose in a hypothetical state of ignorance of their social, economic, and historical circumstances.

Locally, nationally, globally, we are far from a society of equal rights. It's true. Not everyone's story has been heard. That said, I like to remember Rebecca Solnit's warning that often when we think we must fight to tell our stories, those stories are telling us. Some times in demanding our rights, we limit our possibilities. ✨

—Barbara Eckstein lives in Iowa City

# Give Us the Ballot

The word “progressive” got bandied about more this year than it has in a while.

Who is a progressive? Who is a “real” progressive? Who will continue a progressive legacy after the 2016 election?

Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders debated what it means to be a progressive at the beginning of the 2016 Democratic presidential nominating process, with both claiming progressive bona fides.

Here’s what I say. You are not a progressive unless you have read *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America* by Fairfield, Iowa’s own Ari Berman.

In this extensively researched, easy to read text, Berman reminds many of us of the reason we became politically active: as a way of engaging in progress toward racial and social justice centered around the Voting Rights Act (VRA) signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on Aug. 6, 1965.

There has been a concerted, well-planned effort to suppress provisions of the VRA. The June 25, 2013 decision by the Supreme Court of the United

States to overturn Section 4, which required certain states to get pre-clearance of changes to voting laws from the Department of Justice, was only the most obvious, recent incident. Berman’s account of the Nixon and Reagan administrations provides insight that de-fanging the law was part of Republican intent from the beginning. My reaction was

incredulity at everything that was happening before my eyes without me understanding it.

Berman interviewed Rep. John Lewis extensively for the book (along with many others) and it shows. Lewis wrote in the *Washington Post*,

“(Give Us The Ballot) should become a primer for every American, but especially for congressional lawmakers and staffers, because it so capably describes the intricate interplay between grass-roots activism and the halls of Congress . . . Congress must fix the Voting Rights Act, and Berman’s book explains why, without passion or favoritism. It is the first history of the contemporary voting rights movement in the United States. It is long overdue, but Berman’s extensive reporting makes it well worth the wait.”

It’s hard to disagree.

Be a progressive. Read *Give Us the Ballot* this summer. ✨

–Paul Deaton is Solon, Iowa’s own.



Cartoon by Joe Sharpnack first appeared in the *Prairie Progressive* fundraising letter for 2005.

**THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE** is Iowa’s oldest progressive newsletter. It is funded entirely by subscriptions from our readers. Editor for this issue: Dave Leshtz. We appreciate your support.

- \$12 1-year subscription       \$10 1-year gift subscription       \$\_\_\_\_\_ 2016 sustaining fund gift

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Gift Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Gift Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State Zip

Please return to: The Prairie Progressive, P.O. Box 1945, Iowa City, IA 52244

---

---

# Admiral

Naval hero Michiel de Ruyter (1607-1676) is the subject of an unusually big film for the comparatively small Dutch film industry, now streaming on Netflix and directed by Roel Reine (2015), LA based Dutch director (*Death Race 2*, *Condemned 2*). Amped by cgi, the largeness is not misplaced, as de Ruyter was, according to one writer, "one of the most amazing seaborne murder machines to ever pound his enemies to death" with 7 wars, 40 engagements, and 15 massive full-scale battles under his belt in 55 plus years at sea. As mythic as *Braveheart*, he went to sea as a child and grew up a combat genius. He died at 69, cut down by an enemy cannon ball having been sent on a suicide mission by political enemies (the film tells us).

A Dutch maritime and political historian, Gijs Rommeise, denounced the many inventions used to bring de Ruyter's story to life, but he does conclude "that the viewer is treated to spectacular battle scenes...and a lavish view of the social, economic and religious life of the Dutch Golden Age."

Admiral strikes an American patriot chord with its wide-angle look at the world of little Netherlands out of sight on the North Sea and out of mind of our own Anglo-American history. But its republic was so prescient. Since the film hurls you into an ocean filled with great sea warships and cannon fire debris without much context, here is some.

While America was covered in forest, the Netherlands were appended to Catholic King Phillip II of Spain until the Protestants of the lowlands revolted in 1572. Seven Southern provinces lead by William I, Prince

of Orange, declared themselves independent in 1581. The period covered by the film (mid-late 1600's) was during the Dutch Golden Age. It was the only republic in the world with a huge empire that included New Amsterdam in America (Governor Peter Stuyvesant surrendered it to a British naval blockade in 1664 and the city became New York).

Holland was the richest and most urban county in the world. It had the first stock exchange (1602), Rembrandt and Vermeer were part of a flourishing art scene, and its merchant class prosperous and high status. The Dutch economy was based on sea trade, its navy tasked with guarding shipping routes and foiling invasion. They were free-traders, carrying goods around the world without the trade duties imposed by other nations, insulting the egos and coffers of the monarchs of its larger rivals abroad.

Most signifying to Americans, the young Republic was a federation of provinces with a representative federal government seated in the Hague. It had two major parties -- Orangists, conservative loyalists to King William III and monarchy, and Republicans, who were patrons of freedom of speech, religion, and legislative autonomy. Our framers were heavily influenced by the constitution of the Republic of the Dutch United Provinces.

The film opens at the battle of Scheveningen in 1653, part of a many-year English effort to strangle Dutch trade. Michiel de Ruyter (Frank Lammers) is 46; Republican Johan de Witt (Barry Atsma) has just been elected prime minister; and

as he put it, 'our enemies think we are too rich and too free.' The film makes it seem the Anglo-Dutch wars were one long battle during which de Ruyter and his family don't age, although 23 years elapsed. But what does that matter in the furthering of martyrdom?

During his political and professional maturity, we see de Ruyter's collaboration with de Witt to modernize the navy and infuse military strategy into naval battles, each more dramatic than the last. His most daring feat in 1667, in which he invented and deployed his newly trained corps of sea soldiers or "marines." was to sail his war ships up the Thames where they torched half the British fleet and stole flagship HMS Royal Charles, towing it home as a trophy. King Charles II (Charles Dance) was humiliated and met Dutch terms for peace.

De Ruyter's family life, political wrangling at the Hague, and the ongoing naval battles are capped by his majestic funeral. And there you have it. The film lacked a suspenseful *Braveheart*-like story arc, although the horrific murder of the democratic de Witt brothers was a match to William Wallace's demise. Admiral won't be the best epic you ever saw, but it was satisfying to empathize with the Netherlanders in opposing the British enemy in the 1600s as much as we fought them off in the 1700s, both efforts in the name of economic freedom and democracy. ✨

—Lee Liberman lives in Brooklyn, NY, but would rather live in Brooklyn, Iowa.

---

---

*Prairie Dog's Summer Reading List* Continued from Page 1

**The Fire Next Time** by James Baldwin  
25 years later, the writing is as powerful as ever, and the insights into America's racial divide are, unfortunately, as timely as ever. "Whatever white people do not know about Negroes reveals, precisely and inexorably, what they do not know about themselves."

**The Soul of an Octopus**  
by Sy Montgomery  
These cuddly creatures always make the lists of Smartest Animals, but few writers have love affairs with them. This one does, although she insists it's platonic. Readers will no longer find calamari appealing on the menu.

**This Too Shall Pass**  
by Milena Busquets  
A story of sex and death on the Spanish coast. Not too deep, not too light – the perfect beach book for a steamy Iowa summer.

**Amusing Ourselves to Death**  
by Neil Postman  
Thirty years ago, as public discourse in America increasingly began to resemble show business, Postman predicted the rise of politicians who would entertain and control the masses through mastery of new communication technologies. He credits earlier thinkers Marshall McLuhan, for perceiving that mediums determine messages, and

Aldous Huxley, who predicted that people would "adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think." Substitute Twitter for television, and you'll find this book uncannily prescient and useful in understanding the undermining of our democracy. ✨

–Prairie Dog, with thanks to Paul  
"Prairie Mouse" Ingram

**THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE**  
Box 1945  
Iowa City, IA 52244



Warn all gentle and fastidious people  
from so much as peeping into this book.  
–Herman Melville