

THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE



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A NEWSLETTER FOR IOWA'S DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Cousins, Clerics, and the Constitution

When the current Constitution of the State of Iowa was debated and adopted in 1857, the first days of the convention were rife with arguments of moving the convention from Iowa City because of the lack of housing. Out-of-towners thought the price of accommodations in Iowa City were not fair. Besides, as one delegate stated, "Half of the members of the Convention have to sleep three in a bed, and two on a bunk."

The cost of accommodations in Iowa City may still be steep, especially on weekends during the fall months, but otherwise, things have changed. Today, city governments in Iowa City and Ames, and a few other college towns would never allow more than three delegates to sleep three in a bed, much less three in a house. Those cities have ordinances that prohibit a certain number of unrelated individuals from living under the same roof.

A 2007 Iowa Supreme Court decision, *ARPA v. Ames* (Ames Rental), supposedly settles the matter in favor of the City of Ames and other municipalities. An Ames ordinance limited occupancy to certain homes in certain neighborhoods to "no more than three unrelated persons". However, the legal question in this case was whether the Ames ordinance violated

the Equal Protection clauses of the United States and Iowa Constitutions as it pertains to zoning.

Two bills are moving in the Iowa Legislature this year. **House File 161** is a bill in the House of Representatives that prohibits the regulation of rental property by a city based upon familial relationships. It has a partner in the Iowa Senate – **Senate Study Bill 1218** (which will have a new name and number after Prairie Dog sends this out to readers). The bills were identical at their inception, but SSB 1218 has been amended in Committee to allow municipalities to restrict occupancy based on familial status, but an exception may be granted by the board of adjustment.

Neither bill should be necessary. Iowa law already prohibits discrimination in housing based upon familial and non-familial status of renters. Iowa Code section 216.8 clearly states that it "shall be an unfair or discriminatory practice for any person, owner, . . . to refuse to sell, rent, lease, assign, sublease, refuse to negotiate, or to otherwise make unavailable, or deny any real property or housing accommodation or part, portion, or interest therein, to any person because of the race, color, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, national origin, disability, or

familial status of such person." This is directly quoted from Iowa's Civil Rights Statute.

It has been difficult to get legislators to listen to the argument that the Ames Rental lawsuit is not the final word on this matter. The lawsuit was brought by landlords and they sued the city in the only way they could. Landlords could not use the Civil Rights Statute to bring a lawsuit because they would not have standing (standing, or *locus standi*, is the requirement that a plaintiff has sustained or will sustain direct injury and has the ability to have that harm redressed).

Four unrelated college students who have been denied the opportunity to rent a house, or who have been evicted from a house, would have the standing to challenge the ordinance of a city under Iowa's Civil Rights Statute. But first the students would have to make a complaint to the Iowa Civil Rights Commission. After maneuvering through the bureaucracy of the state agency, the students would receive what is called a "right to sue" letter. That allows them to proceed into district court. Going to district court is the first step in eventually getting the Iowa Supreme Court to side with renters and landlords.

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Conquest and diplomacy on Netflix

Happily Netflix has renewed John Fusco's gorgeous and thoughtful epic **Marco Polo** for a second season. The critics were harsh for good reason but viewers liked this medieval Asian game of thrones created by screenwriter-novelist Fusco, and filmed in Kazakhstan, Malaysia, and Venice with nearly all non-American English-speaking cast.

A provocative side note to Fusco's project is a short Smithsonian documentary: **Mystery Files: Marco Polo** (on Netflix) that sheds doubt on our assumptions about Polo. First, the adventures are not *written* by him but by one Rustichello of Pisa, a popular adventure novelist of the time who claimed Marco described his tales to him. A Venetian Marco Polo did exist, but the records of his life do not match up with events documented in China, scholars say. Rustichello, who popularized the Arthurian tales, is thought to have combined accounts of different travelers and attributed them to Marco, combining fact with fiction.

The 90-million dollar first 10 episodes (looking worth every bit) of Fusco's version of Rustichello's **Travels of Marco Polo** depict Polo's conscription into the service of Mongol ruler Kublai Khan as the Khan pursues his ambition to rule all China.

A thoughtful if occasionally stilted script is textured with believable rivalries, relationships, and provocative discussion among fathers, sons, and ministers on the merits of diplomacy versus war. If you watch, do listen. The argument feels particularly modern as the pro

and anti-war factions make their case. We are uneasy allies of Marco. His life depends on his staying in the good graces of captor/mentor Kublai who is driven to conquest by his grandfather Genghis's ambition. We are thus always on the road to conquest, which is executed as feudally as ISIS (so is peace, including slavery). Devout Muslim Vice-Regent Yusuf (Amr Waked, major Egyptian film star), arguing for diplomacy, says egos destroy empires not armies.

Love gets short shrift in this tale, consisting of gauzily filmed writhing concubines and a few perfunctory love scenes -- the emotionally-neutered titillation we have come to expect of most cable series. An exception is the genuine affection and respect between Kublai and Empress Chabi -- you believe their relationship.

The epic starts in Venice and follows the perilous 3-year caravan of Polo's (father, son, uncle) to Mongol capital city Cambulac (now Beijing), a harrowing trek that wraps in half an episode. Arriving in disfavor, Niccolo Polo barter the service of his son to Kublai in exchange for continuing to trade in Kublai's domain. Thus abandoned, Marco's in-and-out of favor role as servant/advisor begins. The Khan had a craven father (Tolui, 4th son of Genghis, who drank himself to death). Kublai acknowledges Marco's misery: "I was about your age when I knew I had to become the man I wished my father were."

Kublai's grandfather/role-model Genghis (d.1227) was the first nomad chieftain to expand Mongol

territory, his armies fighting galloping battles on their small ponies into Central Asia, parts of the Middle East, and East as far as Korea. Genghis's heir, Ogedai, expanded further into territory we know as the former Soviet Union. The geographic holdout was the Song Dynasty in Southern China. A gap of years occurred after Ogedai died until Kublai was elected Khan and resumed Genghis's quest to conquer the Song. Kublai succeeded in 1276 aided in our fictional story by Marco's knowledge of Western war machinery. At that point, Kublai became the ruler of the world's largest contiguous land empire reaching from Europe all the way East to the ocean; it was to break apart in less than 150 years.

That the weaknesses in this tale of Marco Polo mar its enjoyment only a little is a tribute to the success of the whole -- an unusually lovely and engrossing portrayal of medieval Chinese and Mongol politics and culture. The weakness in chief is Lorenzo Richelmy as Marco, a rising young Italian star with vacuous screen presence. There's nothing in his eyes and his hollow affect leaves a hole in the tapestry. But never mind Marco, Kublai himself (British actor Benedict Wong) rises like a lion to occupy the center of this story. Kublai's interactions with his family and subordinates offer a striking portrait of curiosity, leadership, management, ruthlessness, and love.

Joan Chen (American immigrant from Shanghai) is formidable Empress Chabi who manages her mate and

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Stompers, Mugwumps, and a Spoonful

The good timey sounds of jug band music – infectious and influential – have enjoyed popularity since its beginnings in the “spasm” and “novelty” bands that developed in New Orleans in the late 19th and early 20th Century.

The spasm bands not only featured improvisation on a wide variety of standard musical instruments, but the instruments themselves were often homemade and improvised – like the jug in place of a tuba or upright bass. Hence the name, “Jug Band.” Homemade instruments like the jug, washboard, spoons, and one-string ‘bucket’ bass have a long tradition in both early African American and white American cultures.

These early New Orleans jug bands expanded to other regions like Memphis and Louisville by the turn of the 20th Century, playing jazz and blues long before the music was recognized and labeled as such. Jug bands played on the Ohio and Mississippi riverboat paddle wheelers and in many southern night clubs. They were in vaudeville, on the streets, and in traveling medicine shows. These bands created a colorful and exciting aspect to country blues, classic jazz, country & western, and hillbilly musics.

In the 1920s, some of the first jug bands to record were: Clifford Hayes (Louisville Jug Band, Old Southern Jug Band, and Dixieland Jug Blowers); Earl McDonald (The Ballard Chefs, the Original Louisville Jug Band); Buford Threlkeld (Whistler’s Jug Band); and the Birmingham Jug Band of Ben Curry (aka Ben Covington) and Jaybird Coleman. Many of these bands played popular dance band jazz, using the jug as a

novelty element. Vaudeville-blues singer Sara Martin and “The Father of Country Music,” Jimmie Rodgers, both employed jug band ensembles. Some of the biggest names in jazz, blues, and swing worked in these “novelty” bands: Louis Armstrong, Johnny Dodds, Clarence Williams, King Oliver, Willie “The Lion” Smith, Lonnie Johnson, Eddie Condon, Jimmy Dorsey, Gene Krupa, Eddie Lang, Red McKenzie, Jack Teagarden, Frankie Trumbauer, Muggsy Spanier, and Glenn Miller.

The Memphis area jug bands were more firmly rooted in country blues and earlier African-American traditions. Groups such as Jack Kelly and his South Memphis Jug Band, Jed Davenport’s Beale Street Jug Band, Noah Lewis’ Jug Band, Will Shade’s Memphis Jug Band, and Gus Cannon’s Jug Stompers recorded the great songs that became the basis for the later jug band revival: “Stealin’,” “Jug Band Music,” “On the Road Again,” “Whoa, Mule,” “Minglewood Blues,” “Walk Right In,” and many others. Blues great Ma Rainey’s tub-jug band featured the first recordings of slide guitarist Tampa Red, who later formed his own Hokum Jug Band. Blues legends Big Bill Broonzy and Memphis Minnie cut a few sides each backed up by their own jug bands.

The Great Depression of the 1930s and the devastating effect of radio on record sales reduced the output of jug band music to a trickle. The sound of the washboard and tub bass, however, lasted into the 1940s as an integral part of the “Bluebird Beat” in Chicago, a form of vaudevillian-rooted classic, country, and Delta acoustic blues. Slide guitarist/singer Bukka White’s “Fixin’ to Die,”

recorded in 1940, is driven by the syncopated rhythms of Washboard Sam.

There was a revival in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the United States. Gus Cannon’s “Walk Right In” was a #1 hit for The Rooftop Singers in 1963; the only time a jug band song topped the charts. This sparked the formation of a number of jug bands that reached national prominence: the Orange Blossom Jug Five featuring Dave Van Ronk, the Jim Kweskin Jug Band, the Even Dozen Jug Band, The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, and many others. Jug band music was experiencing a revival in Europe as well, where it was called “Skiffle.” The word “skiffle” – meaning “rent party,” a house party with admission to raise money to pay the rent – originated in 1920s Chicago.

Jug band music certainly influenced rock & roll. The Even Dozen Jug Band featured John Sebastian, who later formed The Lovin’ Spoonful, and Steve Katz, who became a member of Blood, Sweat & Tears. Maria Muldaur was in the Even Dozen and the Jim Kweskin Jug Bands before embarking on a solo career as a blues/jazz and country artist. Zal Yanovsky had been a member of The Mugwumps Jug Band before joining The Lovin’ Spoonful. Fellow Mugwumps Cass Elliot and Denny Doherty went on to become famous as one half of The Mamas and the Papas. Mother McCree’s Jug Champions – featuring Jerry Garcia, Bob Weir, and Ron “Pigpen” McKernan – evolved into the legendary rock band The Grateful Dead. Country Joe and the Fish began as The Instant Action Jug Band. Mungo Jerry, who had evolved from an earlier blues group, Good Earth,

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Stompers, Mugwumps and a Spoonful

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was initially a jug band. Jesse Colin Young of The Youngbloods' first hit was "Grizzly Bear," a jug band standard.

Tributes to jug band music can even be found in pop-rock, including "Willie and the Poor Boys" by Creedence Clearwater Revival;

Sebastian's "Younger Girl," which used the melody of Gus Cannon's "Prison Wall Blues;" and "Jug Band Music" by The Lovin' Spoonful.

Today there is an ever-growing interest in jug band music with bands around the globe, jug band festivals, and competitions. The infectious joy,

swagger, sensitivity, and creativity of jug band music contributes to its long-lasting popularity in its own right, and continuing influence on popular music and culture. ✂

Michael "Hawkeye" Herman
grew up in Rock Island

Hoovering in Iowa

The Iowa Democratic Party's coordinated campaign has been a blessing and a curse, and it's time to blow it up and start over.

As much as one believes progressive elected officials would provide better policy and governance for the vast majority of Iowans, the message is not getting out. Republicans are suppressing the wackiness in extreme elements of their party enough to garner substantial and winning support in the electorate.

Here's a reminder: 2014 brought us Joni Ernst, Terry Branstad and Steve King. 2016 will be more of the same unless we change our politics.

Based on discussions with my neighbors and local progressive activists, there are four reasons the coordinated campaign should be blown up:

1 There is limited buy-in from local activists to the coordinated campaign. Campaign choices – locating resources like paid staff, offices, house parties and mailers – are made by others and some decisions don't make sense. There has been a clear disconnect from precinct politics that used to be a Democratic strength.

Without increased buy-in from local activists, progressive election wins are unlikely.

2 Republicans were surprised by the Democratic organization of the 2006 and 2008 campaigns. They caught up. I used to laugh at Team Nussle's efforts to organize phone banks and canvasses in 2006, but no more. The 2014 general election stands as evidence that Republicans do more than take money from billionaires. They improved their ground game.

3 Democrats failed to articulate a coherent message. Where Republicans made significant inroads is their effectiveness of identifying stakeholders in government and offering solutions. They framed solutions as bipartisan, but the core message that won elections is the sense of belonging their campaigns helped create. The coordinated campaign's focus on canvasses and get out the vote efforts on targeted voters, left messaging to others, and a broad sector of the electorate on the table. Republicans have been Hoovering these voters up.

4 Democrats don't get the role of third party resources. As annoying

as it is that Senator Ernst wears an Americans for Prosperity pin at public events, Republicans have become masters of campaign finance laws, giving them an advantage the coordinated campaign couldn't match. Because of its structure, the coordinated campaign made poor use of third party resources. Tom Steyer's NextGen Climate took a drubbing from liberal bloggers in 2014, and some of the criticisms were rightly placed. In a time of the Citizens United ruling, Democratic leaders must figure out how to better balance outside resources to advance Democratic issues, while walking the legal tightrope of campaigns not coordinating with third parties.

The key to winning future elections lies outside application of strategies and tactics developed in the 2000s. It is in winning the hearts and minds of our friends and neighbors, and articulating a progressive message that makes sense in the context of real lives. It has always been that way, but the coordinated campaign seems to have forgotten. ✂

– Paul Deaton lives in Solon

his harem with skill. Prince Jingim (Australian Remy Hii), the handsome heir, was given a Chinese name and otherwise reared to prepare him for eventual rule over a united Chinese empire. Jingim's jealousy of his father's attention to Marco waxes and wanes as he matures into warrior and diplomat - Marco and Jingim provide some fireworks as this relationship develops.

If we only get half-baked love stories, the action that does dominate the screen most affectingly is the domestic and political interplay at both the Mongol and Song courts. The court of the Chinese Song has its hawks and doves dominated by Jia Sidao, Singaporean actor Chin Han, the maniacal 'cricket minister' obsessed with the killing tactics of the Praying Mantis, which he uses to deadly effect. The escalation of tension and intrigue between Kublai and Sidao increases as war approaches -- assassination attempts, wild goose chases, episodes of torture, battle, and failed diplomacy march forward to the inevitable final confrontation. Watch it unfold on Netflix for many hours of visual pleasure and topics of war and peace

✦ – Lee Liberman lives in Brooklyn (New York). She reviews films and TV at trustmovies.com.

Farming for the future

Iowa imports 90 percent of its food, according to Crossroads Resource Center. Our food supply is dependent on petroleum whether it's the miles it travels or the chemicals we spray on it. We're going to change that with local healthy food by securing the very land beneath our feet.

We launched Sustainable Iowa Land Trust after two years of research and networking, building a veritable Who's Who of Sustainable Agriculture across the state while collecting wisdom, advice and models from around the country. SILT was also invited to speak to the Slow Money National Gathering in November 2014, where attendees voted to give the group a \$20,000 interest-free loan.

Land speculation continues to drive land prices up and while driving young local food farmers out of the market because they can't compete with either development pressure or commodity price pressure. SILT's model changes all of that: On land donated to SILT, qualified farmers will enjoy long term, inheritable leases while gaining equity in the house, barn and business that they own. On land that SILT protects with

easements, farmers will always enjoy a lower price for the land since it will be restricted from development and conventional agriculture. Either way, local food markets and their farmers will remain close to one another as communities grow around them, providing a successful farming model for the future.

Some of the key leaders involved in SILT's founding include Jean Lloyd-Jones, Joe Bolkcom, Denise O'Brien, Bobby Kaufmann, Jeff Kaufmann, Les Beck, Dick Schwab, Francis Thicke, Lucie Laurian, Fred Kirschenmann and many others listed at silt.org. The organization already has one farm committed, with more than 1,500 acres of land donations and another 1,500 in easement donations under discussion in its first month of existence.

For more information, visit silt.org or call 319-774-3496. ✦

– Suzan Erem lives on the mighty Cedar River with her husband Paul Durrenberger. They are co-authors of *Class Acts: An Anthology of Service Workers and Their Unions*.

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I wouldn't think it would get that far, but I also realize that when a government body is involved in a lawsuit it will use unlimited resources (tax dollars) to go as far as necessary to get its way.

This is not just about college students. Justice David Wiggins, in his dissent in Ames Rental, wrote: "Families today, especially ones with teenagers, are just as likely as a group of unrelated persons to have numerous vehicles parked outside their home. In fact, in a college community like Ames, students, the unrelated persons most targeted by the ordinance, are more likely to rely on alternative means of

transportation—public transportation, foot, or bicycle—than a vehicle."

The rationally-written dissent offers more common sense arguments, such as: "As another court has articulated under a similar ordinance, 'twenty male cousins could live together, motorcycles, noise, and all, while three unrelated clerics could not'."

That raises a funny question. Would a convent be excluded from the ordinance because all the residents are sisters?

This last thought provokes another question. How do you prove that you are related or not related to

another? Will DNA samples have to be procured? I'm comfortable with the government knowing 'approximately how many people' live in a particular building; I am not okay with the government knowing "who" lives in a particular building. Finally, two unrelated mothers with two children each, living together, would violate these ordinances.

The concept of restricting unrelated people from living together is outdated. The best solution to this battle between cities and landlords is to repeal these archaic ordinances. ✨

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