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# THE PRAIRIE PROGRESSIVE

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*a newsletter for Iowa's Democratic Left*

*Summer 2022*

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## Prairie Dog's Summer Reading List 2022

**M**ercy Street by Jennifer Haigh

What kind of person has the commitment and the strength to work at a big-city abortion clinic? No answer is possible, but Haigh shows how one woman does it, while glimpsing into the souls of stressed-out women of all ages who ask many questions, the most common being "How much does it cost?" Equally fascinating are the lives of others who swirl in the clinic's orbit: the protestors, the ex-husbands, the Boston cops, the neighborhood pot-dealer, the would-be terrorist.

### **Our Country Friends**

by Gary Shteyngart

A medium-famous novelist trying to sell a TV pilot invites some old friends to his upstate New York home to re-connect and take refuge during the COVID pandemic. Plenty of sex (masked and unmasked), ominous pick-up trucks on gravel roads, careerist maneuvering, alcoholic hilarity, college loves rekindled, and enough dysfunctional group dynamics to satisfy the most jaded therapist.

**Ocean State** by Stewart O'Nan

One of America's greatest living novelists once again makes Prairie Dog's reading list with a sharp-eyed depiction of life in a blue-collar Rhode Island town where a teen-

age romance erupts in violence.

O'Nan's skill is so profound that he can tell you what's going to happen in his very first sentence ("When I was in eighth grade my sister helped kill another girl.") but hold you in suspense for 266 pages.

**The Hard Crowd** by Rachel Kushner

Mostly set in California but with stops in Des Moines and Iowa City, the author of *The Flamethrowers* and *Telex from Cuba* writes with wit and stern self-appraisal about her chaotic adolescence in the 1960s.

**Smoke** by Joe Ide

The fifth in a series about private investigator Isaiah Quintabe, known as "IQ." Multiple subplots with colorful characters twist and turn before converging in a finale of over-the-top bloodshed, but Japanese-American Ide secures his place in the top tier of contemporary mystery writers.

### **The Next Civil War: Dispatches from the American Future**

by Stephen Marche

Not for the faint-hearted.

**The Shadows of Men**

by Abir Mukherjee

The fifth in a series of history/mystery novels (the first was *A Rising Man*) about a Scotland Yard detective

deployed to India, this time trying to prevent a bloodbath in the politically fraught Calcutta of the 1920s. Will the murder of a Hindu theologian lead to all-out religious warfare, or will Captain Wyndham and Sergeant "Surrender-Not" Banerjee find the killers in steamy Bombay?

**The Cold Millions** by Jess Walter

Two brothers hop a train to Spokane 100 years ago and get caught up in the Wobbly uprising. Millionaires, hobos, anarchists, strippers and showgirls, tricksters and hustlers, union firebrands, hired goons, vigilantes, socialists, mine owners, penniless men looking for work ("the cold millions"), and 19-year-old Elizabeth Gurley Flinn all collide in a wildly entertaining tale of class struggle in a still-young America.

**Farming for Our Future: The Science, Law, and Policy of Climate-Neutral Agriculture** by Peter Lehner and Nathan Rosenberg

A detailed but readable analysis of the American system of agriculture that lives up to its imposing title. Every Iowan and every taxpayer continue to subsidize the powerful agribusiness sector of our economy; the authors offer workable policy reforms for healthy soil, cleaner water, decreasing

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# “Hey, Jim, what’s it like to be the mayor?”

I heard that question over and over during the four-year period I was Mayor of Iowa City. It revealed a simple truth: many (if not most) people know very little about local politics. If we want democratic governance to thrive, this needs to change.

Many people I talked with (even well-informed Prairie Progressive readers!) had no idea how the mayor of Iowa City is elected or what the mayor does. They typically did not know what the spatial boundaries of the city are, how Iowa City government is structured, what its powers are, and how those powers are constrained and shaped by Iowa state government, the federal government, and many other actors. Instead, many people I spoke with often seemed to think the mayor runs the show and presumed that Iowa City government has the power to solve problems like the difficulty of finding affordable housing, rectifying racial injustice, or reducing greenhouse gas emissions. With a simple snap of one’s fingers, the all-powerful mayor and city government can make things happen. Wrong.

Answering that simple question of “what’s it like to be the mayor?” was one of the key reasons I wrote my new book, *Co-crafting the Just City: Tales from the Field* by a Planning Scholar Turned Mayor. More specifically, I wanted to help readers learn what council members and mayors do and what it feels like to occupy those positions. Consequently, the book reports how, using democratic processes of governance, the residents and elected leaders of Iowa City tried from 2012 through 2019 to co-craft their city’s future while being immersed in a complex and contentious flow of action.

I also wanted readers to learn that local elected leaders are not powerless; they have discretion about how to use the powers they do have. I wanted to document what happened when council allies and I tried during my terms as mayor of Iowa City from 2016 through 2019 to lead our relatively small city toward becoming a more inclusive, just, and sustainable place; that is, a more “just city.”

In Chapters Two through Four of the book, I report what the residents, elected leaders, and professional staff of Iowa City did during this eight-year period. Narrated in my voice as a participant in these activities, these chapters provide a ring-side seat for

**Three visions of  
Iowa City’s future  
are contending for  
control of our city.**

witnessing what I thought, felt, and did as these events were unfolding. The fifth chapter focuses on what I thought, felt, and did on two days early in March of 2019. The closing chapter offers some basic conclusions pertaining to the book’s general objective and specific aims.

The story is oriented around three key conflicts, only the first of which I anticipated at the beginning of my term in 2012. Those conflicts were, first, inter-local economic competition between Iowa City and its neighboring cities, especially Coralville, to attract capital investment and highly-educated workers. This conflict provided the foundation for most of the city

council’s and city manager’s key actions from 2012 through 2015.

The second conflict was between neo-liberal “Boomtown” advocates (a.k.a. the growth machine or pro-growth coalition) and a loose coalition (a.k.a. “the Core Four”) which sought to turn Iowa City toward becoming a more inclusive, just, and sustainable city.

And the third was the extremely sharp conflict between the political preferences of most Iowa City residents and the ethno-nationalist, conservative Christian, free-market fundamentalist regimes that dominated state and federal government.

Why does this matter? The story told in my book reveals that three visions of Iowa City’s future are contending for control of our city. Ask yourself, what would Iowa City look like two or more decades from now if city policies and actions were set by white nationalists, libertarians, and fundamentalist Christians? Or if neo-liberal free market advocates ruled the place and did nothing but try to out-compete other cities by cutting property taxes, increasing subsidies for favored developments, privatizing more public services, and selling public property? How would those imagined cities differ from one that was co-crafted by the people of the city using democratic processes of governance?

I invite you to read the book, let me know what you think, and become more knowledgeable about and engaged in city politics wherever you live.

*—Jim Throgmorton has no further electoral ambitions*

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# Judicial gaslighting

A sixteen-year veteran of Scott County’s emergency dispatch system answered a 911 call from a woman screaming over and over, “Help me, my baby is dead.” The woman’s high-pitched screams continued for more than two minutes.

The dispatcher eventually got the woman’s address and dispatched first responders. She soon heard a report from a police officer who arrived on the scene and found a dead infant that appeared to have been attacked with a claw hammer. In the months that followed, the dispatcher couldn’t shake the mother’s screams from her mind or her ears. Loud noises, especially, would trigger debilitating anxiety. She sought medical help. A counselor and two doctors diagnosed her with PTSD resulting from the call.

Demonstrating the new knife’s edge of the Iowa Supreme Court, its judges ruled by a single vote in early June that this dispatcher had suffered a workers’ compensation injury.

Iowa’s workers’ compensation system is a hundred years old. It has, however imperfectly, evolved with the times. About forty years ago, Iowa recognized that a person who suffers a physical injury at work might reasonably suffer depression, anxiety, or other mental health diagnoses stemming from the work injury. Mental health injuries were recognized to be part of the work injury deserving of treatment and, potentially, compensation.

In the 1990’s, the Iowa Supreme Court recognized that a mental work injury can occur even without physical trauma. In the Dunlavey decision, the Court found that

cumulative workplace stress can be a workers’ compensation injury if it leads to a mental health diagnosis and the stressful experience was of a “greater magnitude” than a person in that job should reasonably expect. Several years later, in the Brown decision, the Court addressed a single traumatic workplace situation – an employee being held up at gunpoint. Brown indicated that, though the injured worker must demonstrate a connection between the workplace trauma and their mental health, they

“Help me,  
my baby is dead.”

do not have to demonstrate their highly stressful incident was more stressful than one would expect.

In the recent Scott County decision, the Iowa Supreme Court upheld the law – barely. Conservative Justice McDermott ably described the facts and the evolution of the law, concluding that the Brown decision applied in this case; mental illness linked to one workplace event is a valid Iowa workers’ compensation claim. The Scott County dispatcher need not demonstrate that calls received by other dispatchers were less stressful. Justice McDermott was joined by two other Governor Reynolds appointees and the lone remaining Democrat, Justice Appel. Unfortunately, there was caustic dissent from Scott County’s own Justice Waterman. In what might be described as judicial gaslighting, Waterman accused McDermott and the other justices of making a “radical break with existing law.” Waterman falsely argued that mental injury claims stemming from single traumatic incidents have always had to demonstrate that the stress

experienced was greater than the day-to-day stressors of similarly situated employees. At times, Waterman’s opinion reads like an older lawyer trying to put the younger lawyer – McDermott – in his place. Waterman was joined in his dissent by Justices Mansfield and McDonald.

Iowa law requires Supreme Court justices to retire at age 72. This means Justice Appel will soon be stepping down from the Court, which means that soon every justice will be a Governor Branstad or Reynolds appointee. With just six Republican appointees, this case shows a balance between three reasonably conservative justices who still believe in the value of precedent and following the law, and three who are focused on a far-right outcome without letting the facts or the law get in their way.

—Dave Leshtz

*Editor’s note: Alas, shortly after this article was written in which Justice McDermott was complimented for respecting judicial precedent, he voted to overturn precedent and find that there is no fundamental right to an abortion in Iowa.*

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independent voice!**

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# Iowa's oldest progressive newsletter marches on

As we moved through the 1990s, Prairie Dog's Reading List continued annually, with contributions by Prairie Light Bookstore buyer and resident raconteur Paul Ingram. Recommendations included University of Iowa history professor Shel Stromquist's *Solidarity and Survival*, Mumia Abu-Jamal's *Live from Death Row*, and the exquisitely titled *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven* by Sherman Alexie. Also on the list: Iowan Osha Davidson's *The Best of Enemies: Race and Redemption in the New South*.

Our film critic Jae Retz wrote of *The Bridges of Madison County*, "It was quite a sight to see so many wholesome family-first Iowans turn out for this joyful celebration of adultery."

On undercover assignment, college student Andy Peebler reported from the Republican Straw Poll Day in Ames. Our intrepid correspondent ate burgers and BBQ courtesy of Pat Buchanan and Phil Gramm but was dismayed that beer was offered by only one would-be President—remember Titan Tire CEO Morry Taylor?

Art Cullen and his brothers made Prairie Dog's Honor Roll nearly a quarter century before Art and The Storm Lake Times were honored with a Pulitzer Prize. Marty Ryan, lobbyist for the Iowa Civil Liberties Union, was recognized for being "so dedicated that he is even willing to have lunch with Republicans if necessary to preserve the Constitution." Ryan went on to become a valued regular contributor to The Prairie Progressive.

Senator Tom Harkin was castigated by editor Jeff Cox for voting to repeal the section of the Social

Security Act of 1935, throwing federal food stamp eligibility to the states: "AFDC (Aid to Dependent Families and Children) recipients now have no defenders, not even Senator Harkin."

Prairie Dog castigated Democratic legislators from Johnson County for voting in favor of 15% across-the-board income tax cuts (only Minnette Doderer voted No). Castigation continued, this time against the Iowa City City Council for overly-aggressive policing, neglecting the library, and taxing the poor.

Jae Retz panned *The Titanic* but stayed positive: at least "there will be no toy spinoff." American Federation of Teachers Local 176 President Clara Oleson celebrated the decisive Service Employees International Union organizing victory at University of Iowa Hospital and Clinics, an achievement "so much greater and more honorable than the Coral Ridge mall."

Throughout its history The Prairie Progressive has been a loud voice against a local option sales tax. So far, so good in the nearly perpetual battle to prevent shifting the tax burden as much as possible from upper-income to lower-income residents.

Prairie Dog ended the decade seeking "any candidate...to honestly examine the racist, classist, and hopelessly ineffective drug laws supported by both major parties." Alas, twenty-two years later, Iowa remains one of the most backward states on marijuana, ignoring the popularity and economic benefits of decriminalizing pot and maintaining an embarrassingly limited policy for medical marijuana.

The new century brought us a report by Jeff Cox from London on the

campaign of Ken Livingstone, the Labour Party's mayoral candidate, who offered voters "a chance to give the Nixon-like Prime Minister Tony Blair...a bloody nose." Jae Retz decried the Academy's repeated stiffing of Denzel Washington for Best Actor.

The Prairie Progressive editorial board scored an exclusive interview with the spirit of Emma Harvat, the former mayor of Iowa City and one of America's first female mayors. As wise as ever, she correctly forecast the defeat of the jail referendum, and chastised the city manager's effort to undercut expansion of the public library: "Hell, I'd make the entire downtown a library if I could!"

Amanda Coyne contributed a moving piece about reuniting with her sister who had just been released after five years in prison for "conspiring to deliver a controlled substance." The ever-vigilant Cox noted that the Iowa Democratic Party "was transformed into a soft money fundraising machine while the presidential caucuses were being transformed into a media campaign." New Honor Roll members included Cedar Rapids Mayor Lee Clancy for having "the sense to resist the rain forest that Coralville fell for," and Iowa City Superintendent of Schools Lane Plugge for pulling the plug on the DARE program.

The PP proudly featured articles by former State Senators Art Small and Tom Higgins, Des Moines attorney Jonathan Wilson, and Clara Oleson's obituary for Minnette Doderer ("There is not another legislator in the last 40 years who so shaped Iowa law for women and children."). First-term Johnson County Supervisor Rod Sullivan blasted Coralville's use of Tax Increment Financing to build

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# On complementarianism and carbines

I cannot fully shake from my mind the association of what took place on June 2nd in Ames, Iowa—an act of [domestic violence](#) by a man against his former partner and her friend who he callously murdered—with questions of why it took place at a place of faith, and perhaps more to the point, a *particular* place of faith. Of note here is the complementarian approach to gender roles practiced by this church—Cornerstone—which gives cause for question, along with the [alignment](#) of the church’s practices and leadership with an increasingly reactionary, nationalist strain of conservative politics.

Cornerstone and its affiliates stake out a pretty clear stance on the extent to which they consider men and women to be equal: *well yes, but actually no*. While stated to be equal before God, their [complementarian](#) position ultimately separates their roles in society—perhaps most saliently in its restriction of the role of elder [to men exclusively](#). In practice, this complementarian framework places men disproportionately in positions of decision-making and authority, both in public and private life. Even with this qualification of ultimate equality before God, in actuality the promotion of this concept can provide cover for toxic masculinity, one that promotes a sense of manhood through entitlement and aggression, perhaps even to the point of destruction.

The same environment which places preference for the agency of men over women is also one that spends much more time [policing](#) womens’ behavior around men rather than vice versa, out of misplaced notions of modesty and ‘temptation.’ Arguably more a product of mid-20th century [suburban](#) fantasy and

[conservative pop culture](#) than any real basis in Scripture, it nevertheless has real, material consequences, and one can begin to see how at the margins, violent misinterpretation can take place.

Where this perhaps turns into a truly American affliction is the use of the firearm as an identifier of strength through force and as a tool of coercion, denial, and death. By now, the Republican Party and the consumer arms industry in the US have entered into a [deep-set affiliation](#) along with the religious right to cement the dominion of firearms over human life itself, [making martyrs](#) out of the dead and using, at the very least, the [rhetoric](#) of Christianity to [justify](#) their aim. Verses from the Bible are printed on [rifles](#) and their [optical sights](#), [various denominations](#) own their own weapons companies, and the manufacturer of the rifle used in the Uvalde shooting [quoted](#) the Book of Proverbs (22:6) in advertising its AR-15-style carbine. While the assailant in Ames used a pistol for his crimes (as is the case for the [majority](#) of gun deaths in the US), he indeed had [brought along](#) an AR-15 with spare ammunition as well.

It is nevertheless important to also account for the potential ecological fallacy of equating broad national trends with events at one particular place at one particular time. Just because right-wing evangelicals in the United States have [broadly aligned themselves](#) with white nationalists in the Republican Party, expanding access to firearms, and a garrison mentality which provides justification for the civilian hoarding of arms and ammunition in the US, this does not mean that Cornerstone or their affiliates have necessarily expounded on the topic at length

themselves, or aligned themselves with conservative politicians because of their stance on firearms. Nor do these trends on a macro-scale necessarily imply that all congregants uniformly adhere to these particular views on firearms. And yet this shooting—merely one in a long string of others motivated by male frustration and hate—only reinforces the notion that thoughts and prayers alone, and the current modality writ large, are not enough.

These concepts have been explored more deeply by people with more knowledge, experience, and dedication to the topics at hand than myself. Criticisms of complementarianism, including its implications for domestic violence, as well as the link between easy access to firearms and gender-based violence by men against women, have all been [well studied](#), and the work that other people have already done on these topics should be recognized.

At the very least, it is long overdue for the state’s political leaders to take action to restrict access to firearms to people with known records of violence and abuse, but given their creation of a regulatory system which makes firearms [simpler to acquire](#) than this land’s other [Moloch, the car](#), such action is likely wishful thinking. In the absence of state capacity to do much of anything on the issue, alternate avenues for action—*before the next shooting*—must be explored, including deconstructing and interrogating the material impact of rituals and practices here on earth, including ones which grant men undue space to exercise power through force, both real and implied, intentionally or unintentionally.

—Austin Wu is an editorial fellow with The Cedar Rapids Gazette

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# Boo Who?

Fans began to boo as the Minnesota Twins shortstop, Carlos Correa, walked up to the plate at Kauffman Stadium in Kansas City, Missouri. “Cheater!” rang out as Correa made contact with the ball and successfully landed on base.

Some fans will never forgive the former Houston Astros player for being involved in the sign stealing scandal a few years back. It isn’t that past and present baseball teams don’t try to gain an edge by figuring out the catcher’s signs to the pitcher for more successful at bats, it’s that there are policies in place that prohibit the use of electronic devices to capture and communicate the opposing teams signals, and the Astros violated this policy. None of the players were punished; in fact, they were given immunity for their cooperation. A few managers were suspended for up to a year for failing to prevent the violation. The team was fined \$5 million and lost draft picks. Although it was touted as the most severe punishment ever handed down, it seemed rather watered-down compared to what happened to a number of players a hundred years ago.

The members of the “Black Sox” paid heavy consequences for being accused of intentionally throwing the 1919 World Series for money, even though they were acquitted after a public trial in 1921. The event led to establishing the first Commissioner of Baseball to restore the integrity of the game. This lone person was given incredible power. A permanent ban from professional baseball was enforced on the accused eight White Sox players, including any consideration for the Hall of Fame. There was no support for these players to challenge this decision nor a strong union to change the

circumstances that may have led to the scandal. They were grossly underpaid, even though they were highly skilled and successful players, having won the 1917 World Series. Back then, players were restricted by the reserve clause, which kept them from switching teams without permission. It wasn’t until 1968 that the first collective bargaining was negotiated. In 1970, players achieved the ability to negotiate the right to arbitration to resolve grievances.

The idea for a commissioner to be responsible for maintaining the integrity of baseball within the game itself has merit, whether it’s establishing consequences for acts of cheating such as sign stealing or suspensions for players who take performance-enhancing drugs. The great American pastime should have an even playing field so that teams have an equal opportunity to win the World Series and players reach the Hall of Fame based on talent, not steroid use. But is it wise for the commissioner to expand his oversight of the playing field and enter to judge the players’ bedroom activities? It gets dicey.

The best example of this is Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Trevor Bauer, who received a 324-game suspension for violating MLB-MLBPA Joint Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Child Abuse Policy that was established in 2015. The policy grants MLB commissioner Rob Manfred the authority to suspend players for “just cause.” Bauer received the most severe suspension ever handed down and is the first player to appeal a decision. He vehemently denies violating the policy. Bauer enjoys rough sex

with consenting partners. Last year a San Diego woman accused him of sexual assault during two sexual encounters and received a temporary restraining order. After a four-day hearing, a L.A. Superior Court judge dissolved the temporary restraining order, ruling that Bauer did not pose a threat and the injuries sustained were not the result of anything the woman objected to before or during the encounter. She sent a text message asking to be choked out. The pictures given as evidence were disturbing and would most likely have led to a conviction or plea agreement, if she hadn’t given her consent to this treatment.

The L.A. County District Attorney’s Office reviewed the case for five months and determined that the People were unable to prove the charges beyond a reasonable doubt. It seems to be a classic ‘he said, she said’ scenario. It’s difficult to understand giving consent to be seriously hurt for sexual gratification, but a line does exist. Uncle Sam doesn’t want to monitor bedroom activities between two consenting adults.

Who should fans root for or boo at during arbitration? The MLB joint policy on domestic abuse Award in was written by committee with the MLPBPA to incorporate fairness, education and counseling for this difficult and painful issue. Trevor Bauer won the National League Cy Young 2020 and joined the Dodgers on a 3-year, \$102 million dollar contract. He is suspended without pay and his contract will expire as he works through the process. Since the commissioner is appointed by the owners, should he continue to wield such power without transparency and oversight?

—Stephanie Fawkes-Lee is Senior Sports Correspondent for the Prairie Progressive

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**Prairie Dog's Summer Reading List 2022, cont'd from Page 1**

greenhouse gas emissions, and ending the exploitation of food chain workers.

**Queen of the Tiles** by Hanna Alkafa  
All's fair in love and Scrabble.

—*Prairie Dog*

**They Don't Want Her There: Fighting Sexual and Racial Harassment in the American University** by Carolyn Chalmers

Carolyn Chalmers was Jean Jew's lawyer in the ground-breaking case of Jean Jew vs. The University of Iowa and related legal proceedings. In this well-written account of Prof. Jew's torment at the hands of her colleagues in the Anatomy Department in the College of Medicine, the university administration's refusal to intervene, the resulting legal maneuverings, and U.S. District Court Judge Harold D. Vietor's wide-ranging 1990 ruling in Prof. Jew's favor, Ms. Chalmers gives chilling insight into academia only slightly more than 30 years ago. For most of us who remember the case, we can now see that the reality of what happened to Prof. Jew was so much worse than we knew at the time. For those becoming acquainted with the case for the first time, the book provides a useful perspective on the Me Too movement and anti-discrimination law in general. Underlying it all is the story of two brave women who dared to take on a self-satisfied university community and an evolving body of law to develop new definitions of fairness and equity that benefit us all. (Editor's note: Alert readers will recognize many Iowa City and University of Iowa faces, including attorney Jim Hayes, UI administrator Sue Buckley, and Prairie Progressive contributor Kim Painter).

—*Lois Cox*

**Iowa's oldest progressive newsletter, cont'd from Page 4**

the Coral Ridge mall.

After David Skorton resigned as President of the University of Iowa, the ever-prescient Jeff Cox foresaw that the next President "will take charge of a corporate-based privatization program that is well under way." Not to be outdone, Prairie Dog predicted growing animosity toward Iowa's first-in-the-nation caucuses; he urged saving them by moving the date up to Christmas Day (most people won't have to take time off work, we all need a legal outlet for the season's repressed resentments and disappointments, and we might learn who Jesus would caucus for).

In future issues we'll continue to chronicle The Prairie Progressive's history, a reflection of what our readers and writers have experienced and observed over the past three and a half decades.

—*Prairie Dog*

The past is never  
dead. It's not even  
the past.

—William Faulkner

What to the slave is the 4th  
of July?

—Frederick Douglass, 1852



**July 14, 1912**

Woody Guthrie born

**August 12, 2017**

Heather Heyer killed while protesting white nationalists in Charlottesville

**August 13, 1942**

Manhattan Project to develop nuclear weapons began

**September 10, 1962**

Supreme Court ruled that University of Mississippi must admit James Meredith

**September 11, 2012**

US Consulate attacked in Benghazi

**September 17**

US Constitution Day

**September 24, 1957**

"Little Rock 9" escorted to high school by federal troops

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