



THE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

OF THE

FIRST FRIDAY

BREAKFAST CLUB, INC.

First Friday News & Views

JANUARY
2008
VOLUME
13
ISSUE
1

Democracy in the Balance

by Jonathan Wilson

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CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, January 4, 2008 at Hoyt Sherman Place.
Our guest speaker will be Judy Bradshaw, Des Moines Chief of Police.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by Friday, December 28 to Jonathan Wilson @davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

Our civil liberties are being eroded, and not by accident. They are being purposefully eroded by an errant Bush administration. We’ll be lucky to avoid an unprovoked attack on Iran before the end of Bush’s term. Frankly, we’ll be lucky if Bush leaves office voluntarily at the end of his term. Luck is no way to run, or preserve, a democracy.

Bush has declared that the Constitution is nothing but a “God damned piece of paper.” Given his Nixonian conviction that anything he does, or authorizes, is legal just because he did it or authorized it, anything becomes possible, if not probable. Bush sees himself and his friends above the law and beyond accountability.

And, no matter what he does or condones, he finds vocal supporters. No matter that they may be in the distinct minority; their voices are still heard in the name of “balanced” reporting. With public opinion approval hovering around 30%, in a nation of 300 million, that still leaves **90 million** people who think this guy’s doing a good job.

The list is long that counts the losses that our liberties have sustained over the course of the last six years. This President has consistently used “signing statements” in an unprecedented manner to announce, in advance, that he claims exemption from laws enacted by Congress. He has authorized illegal and literally unwarranted eavesdropping on US citizens, and sought retroactive immunity for complicit communication companies. He has suspended *habeas corpus* that is the **only** mechanism ever invented for reining in the ultimate government abuse of individual liberty—unchallengeable imprisonment (at Guantanamo Bay and at “secret” prisons around the world).

He has lied to launch unprovoked foreign wars at great cost in lives and tax dollars that we don’t have and have had to borrow from our international competitors and, in effect, from our great grand children. He has slaughtered an untold number of civilians as “collateral damage” in an un-winnable “war” declared against a tactic.

He has authorized the outing of a clandestine CIA agent that amounts to nothing less than treason. He promised that anyone in his administration who was involved would face consequences. When the Vice President’s former Chief of Staff was **convicted** by a jury in conjunction with that incident, the consequences turned out to be a Presidential pardon.

He has countenanced the use of terrorist tactics for the supposed purpose of fighting terrorism. He has then countenanced the destruction of material evidence of what would be a crime under United States law and under international law as well. We must assume the evidence was incriminating and compelling.

He has used for political purposes the prosecutorial power of the federal government which is considerable indeed (just ask the acquitted Iowa Senator Matthew McCoy). Moreover, he and his henchmen have repeatedly attacked and attempted to subvert our independent judiciary at every opportunity.

In a further attempt to avoid accountability for himself and his friends, he has illegally

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made secret the log of White House visitors and asserted “executive privilege” on behalf of members of his administration called to testify before Congress.

For a more complete list of this President’s abuses of power and our liberties, refer to the Declaration of Independence. It recites them, every single one. That historic document was, ironically, addressed to King George III, and George W. Bush is the third George to hold the Presidency, after George Washington and George H.W. Bush.

Perhaps most important, and probably at the core of all of this President’s abuses of power, is his violation of the principle that the ends do not, and cannot, justify the means. It is inescapable that if we use the tactics and techniques of the terrorists, the line between “us” and “them” blurs to the point of invisibility. There is, and always has been, a tension between Constitutional liberties and our personal safety. Honoring the one can compromise the other. In our democracy, the necessary balance between those two was struck at the founding of our nation by none other than Patrick Henry when he declared, “Give me liberty or give me death.”

If, without effective challenge, the Constitution is treated by the President as nothing more than a “God damned piece of paper,” his declaration becomes self-fulfilling. Nothing less than our democracy has been put in the balance. If we are lucky enough to have this President leave office voluntarily, I can only hope that the law, both in this country and inter-

Label: Something put on people so you can hate them without having to get to know them first.

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the January 4 meeting no later than December 28 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com. He can also be reached by phone at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Judy Bradshaw, Des Moines Chief of Police.

Thanks to Ryan Weidner for his introduction of our December speaker, Professor Dennis Goldford of Drake University.

Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the FFBC Scholarship Fund. Send your check to Jonathan Wilson, 666 Walnut Street, Suite 2500, Des Moines, IA 50309. Make the check out to FFBC and write “Scholarship” on the memo line.

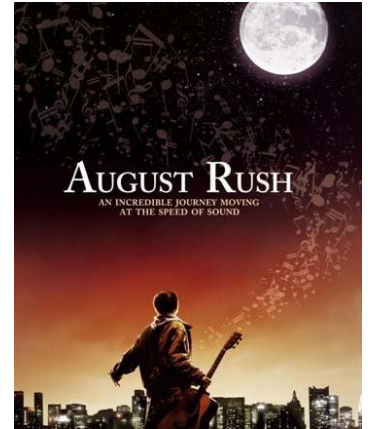
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nationally, will pursue him and finally hold him duly accountable for his manifold misdeeds that make the immorality of his predecessor’s sexual indiscretion pale by comparison. ▼

Honesty in little things is no little thing.

AUGUST RUSH

Review by
Gary Kaufman



August Rush is about an 11-year old boy, Evan, who is an orphan in a home for boys. He has never met his parents, but he knows they are out there. He is also a boy who can hear the music in the wind, in the rushing of the grain in the field, in the world that is out there. As he explains in the beginning of the picture, “Can you hear the music? I can hear it everywhere—in the wind, in the air, in the light, it is all around us. All you have to do is open yourself up. All you have to do is listen.”

He also believes that this music will be the key to finding his parents. The boy explains, “It builds up inside me. If I learn how to play this music, they will know I am here. I know I have a mother and father. The notes that I hear are the ones that they hear. Maybe that is how they found each other and how they will find me. Once upon a time they heard the music and followed it.”

As it turns out, his parents were both musicians, Lyla (Keri Russell) and Louis (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), and they had met by their common attraction to a person playing a song in New York’s Washington Square. They had a magical evening together during which Evan was conceived. But the magic between the couple was smashed by Lyla’s controlling father who would not let her see Louis again. Eventually they settled separately—the mother in Chicago as a music instructor, and the father as a businessman in San Francisco. Louis did not know of the pregnancy, and Lyla was told by her father that the child was lost in childbirth. Neither of them married, and their lives were changed by the event of their meeting.

But beyond the storyline itself, the movie is about music and musicians. Where does the music come from? Is it out there and only certain people can hear it? Evan (Freddie Highmore) runs away to find his parents and ends up in New York City. There he meets the Wizard (Robin Williams), a musical version of Fagin from *Oliver*, who reins over musical

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Political Analysis From Professor David Goldford

Our December speaker was Dennis J. Goldford, Professor of Politics in the Department of Politics and International Relations at Drake University, where he has taught since 1985. Goldford received his B.A. in political science and philosophy from the University of Michigan, an M. Litt. in philosophy from Oxford University, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in political science from the University of Chicago. At Drake, he teaches in the areas of political theory and constitutional law, including courses in politics and religion, the political theories of American conservatism, and a seminar in Constitutional Law. His book **The American Constitution and the Debate Over Originalism** was published by Cambridge University Press in April 2005.



Jonathan Wilson and Dennis Goldford

Goldford is also well known in Iowa, nationally, and internationally as an analyst of US politics; he serves as a political analyst for KCCI-TV in Des Moines and is regularly interviewed by a wide range of national, regional, local, and international media groups. During the 2004 election cycle, he provided analysis for over 50 newspapers, magazines, and wire services, including all the major national organizations (though he doesn't list Fox News) and groups in Canada, Australia, France, Germany, and Japan.

Goldford began his presentation by noting that our 2008 presidential election marks the first time since 1952 that no candidate of either party has been a sitting president or vice president. He called the election of 1896 a "realigning" one, which set the politico-demographic profile of the nation for the ensuing half-century: Republican majorities in the northeast, upper Great Lakes, and west coast areas, and Democratic majorities in the south and great plains. Iconographically, Republicans were generally represented by the color blue, and Democrats by red.

But if you look at the map these days (he said)—although the colors haven't changed—the political situation is almost exactly reversed: Democrats (now blue) predominate in northeast, middle, and west, and Republicans (red) rule in the south, curving up into the great plains. This "southernization of the Republican Party" emerged around the time of what he called "the Goldwater insurgency" in 1964.

And while Republicans are still pretty much agreed that they inhabit the conservative end of the spectrum, Democrats "don't know *what* they are. They're no longer willing to see themselves as the party of the poor and disadvantaged because most voters don't see themselves as poor and disadvantaged."

Continuing in this ironic and amusing vein, Goldford remarked that the seemingly increasing rancor of political dis-

cussion and campaigning usually ends with the voter's fundamental choice at the polling place being simply "Whom do I dislike least??" A lively question-and-answer session ensued, followed by lengthy and enthusiastic applause for his entertaining, insightful presentation.

—Bruce Carr

"I must do something" will always solve more problems than "Something needs to be done."

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runaway children in the remains of the Fillmore East, a deserted theater. The Wizard sends the children out each day to play for money on street corners and in parks. At the end of the day they dutifully hand over their take to the Wizard. Robin Williams's Wizard initially seems like a nice man, but eventually his darker side is revealed. Before that happens, however, Evan's name is changed by the Wizard to August Rush. The child turns out to be a musical genius who sits down with a guitar one night and by morning has mastered a unique technique of playing it musically by pounding on its arm, strings, and body. This enables August to create uniquely beautiful music that soon captures those listening to him play on the streets. Later he discovers a church and is taught musical notes by a young talented singer, Hope (Jamai Simone Nash). August sneaks up to the church's giant pipe organ and, again, just by playing it, he quickly learns how to create beautiful music with that instrument as well. The minister recognizes August's talent and takes him to Julliard where he is immediately taken in and learns about music and begins to compose. He is so good that they decide to play his overture in Central Park with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

One of the beautiful aspects of **August Rush**, is how the director weaves music into the film. When the father and mother are performing (and, to their credit, the actors are actually performing their parts), the mother plays classic cello with the Philharmonic, while the father plays a guitar and sings in a rock band. But their playing is interwoven so beautifully that it actually becomes one piece. There is also a wonderful scene where August meets his father without either of them knowing it. They exchange guitars, and each plays a song with the other one joining in—again they work perfectly together. The final concert piece by August is a cornucopia of sounds and music.

If you love music, you must see this picture. It is a total joy. A discovery of sound. As Robin Williams explains, "You have to love music more than food!" As August explains, "I don't know where it comes from. I just hold on."

The movie is like watching a sports film; you know where it's going, but it's still emotionally exhilarating and fully satisfying once it gets there. The ending of the film **August Rush** is one of the most beautiful endings to a film I've ever seen. It is so simple, and yet it conveys so much. **August Rush** is warm and exhilarating, and perhaps it will awaken the musical muse within you. ▼

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News & Views*

Des Moines, Iowa

JANUARY 2008

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From the Editor

David and Liz: Dancing Through Love

On October 4, 2002, David and Liz Kruidenier came to the First Friday Breakfast Club. At that point, David was legally blind, afflicted with wet macular degeneration. That didn't stop him from being one of the wittiest speakers we have ever had at our meetings. David delivered his speech impromptu since notes would have been superfluous.

On December 12, 2007, David and Liz's official autobiography was unveiled at the Des Moines Art Center during a gala evening that David would have loved—he always liked a good party. Liz was there, looking elegant as always. Unfortunately, David was there in spirit only. As Liz says in the book, "On January 9, 2006, my best friend died."

David and Liz had a great deal of input on the book. Writer Bev Rivera Davis put their story in a bifurcated format, often juxtaposing David's and Liz's interpretations of common events in their lives.

As David's sight grew worse, he hired readers to come to his office or home and read **The Des Moines Register** and **The New York Times** to him. His love of newspapers was legendary. I was fortunate enough to be one of his readers, and many incidents in the book David and Liz related to me during our conversations. These two people have done so much during their lifetimes, and their concern for their community, state, and country, gives the rest of us reason to think about what we can do.

I happened to be the last person to read for David before he died. It was January 4, 2006, and David had been admitted to the hospital with pneumonia. He was obviously stressed, and often during that morning he would lapse into unconsciousness. But when he came to, I would pick up where I had left off, and he would comment and ask questions as he always did with his readers. While I was there, his doctor came into the room. Trying to put the best face on a difficult situation, the doctor asked David how he was doing. David—not missing a beat—told him that it was his job to determine that! I certainly admired that man's pluck.

While I sometimes read to David across from his desk in his office on the ninth floor of **The Register's** building, it was my Sunday readings at his home that gave me the greatest pleasure. He loved the editorials in **The Times** and the "Roses and Thistles" column in **The Register**. And Doonesbury. He loved Doonesbury. Reading a visual cartoon to someone who cannot see is interesting, to say the least. In addition to reading the captions, I would describe the characters, what they were wearing, and the expressions on their faces. Between Gary Trudeau's marvelous take on situations and David's vivid imagination, he always got a laugh from that cartoon.

I miss him. We all miss him. But I hope you won't miss the opportunity to read this book.

—Steve Person

*Trickle up economy: Putting money in the pockets of the poor who will spend it here and create demand.
Trickle down economy: Giving money to the already rich who will invest it anywhere in the world that it's most profitable.*