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Democracy's Six Pillars

by Jonathan Wilson

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CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, April 4, 2008 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

Our guest speaker will be Mike Colwell, Executive Director of Business Innovation Zone.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, April 1 to Jonathan Wilson @davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

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lmost everyone voices support for democracy without much notion of what true democracy actually entails. Democracy is more than majority rule. Much more. A lynch mob is a majority. I think there are six identifiable characteristics, pillars, if you will, without any one of which democracy—true democracy—cannot be said to exist. Without any one of them a purported democracy becomes an illusion.

Transparency of Government. Democracy requires the unfettered opportunity to know what's going on in government. What the government is doing. How decisions are being made and who is making them. There is no transparency if government cannot be trusted to tell the truth. When disclosures are made they must be accurate and complete, even when the truth is unflattering.

Freedom of Expression and Assembly. The first of these freedoms implies the second. With knowledge of what's going on in government, the freedom of expression enables citizens to criticize what's going on, to advocate for something different, and the right to rally and organize those who agree. Freedom of expression finds meaning and has value *only* if extended to unpopular views. If limited to the right to be a cheerleader for the status quo, freedom of expression has no meaning.

Election Integrity. Periodically, citizens must have the opportunity to make changes, peacefully. Elections are that opportunity. To be credible, elections must provide for convenient access to voting, and every vote should be reliably counted, properly reported, and verifiable.

Citizen Equality. Every law-abiding citizen must be assured by government of equal treatment and equal opportunity. In instances of irrational, historic, systematic discrimination—often as not, government-sanctioned discrimination, purposeful, affirmative action is required by government to remedy the residual, adverse consequences of past discrimination. The expectation of equality can even involve the limitation of *private* acts that discriminate against fellow citizens.

Free, Quality Public Education. Quality public education informs citizens through succeeding generations about democratic principles and our shared commitment to them. Quality education empowers citizens with knowledge of accurate information and the analytic skills to apply that knowledge to current events. For all the talk about same-gender marriage or the family being the foundation of our democracy, in reality, free, quality public education is what gives our democracy any hope of actually working.

Access to an Independent Judiciary. The foregoing six principles must, in turn, be embodied in a “constitutional” document by which an independent judiciary is authorized to hold accountable, and even overrule, both those adopting laws (the legislative branch) and those charged with executing the laws (the executive branch).

Only a government and social order founded on these constitutionally guaranteed principles can credibly claim to be a democracy. Any such society is also, inescapably, more vulnerable to attack *from within*. That vulnerability requires citizen vigilance. Democracy is something

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worth fighting for. Fighting for it and preserving it, preserves the human right of all persons to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The attack on 9/11 hit our financial and our military nerve centers. It came within a whisker of hitting our seat of government. More significant has been its role in precipitating an attack *from within* upon our democracy itself when that was deemed politically advantageous to those in power. The 9/11 attack was unconventional and disclosed an unconventional enemy, but it prompted a conventional war with no end that has squandered our good will abroad and is bankrupting us. In the entire history of human conflict, the attack of 9/11, and its collateral damage, has to stand as the most impressive and effective event ever. We dare not shy from acknowledging that truth however much it flatters our enemies. At this time, we were told it was an attack on our way of life. It did not do that directly; it did it collaterally, by recruiting our government to erode the pillars of our democracy. Those who underestimate their enemies will not survive. Those who fail who recognize our enemy within will not long enjoy a democracy. ▼

The US government is printing up checks totaling 168 billion dollars to stimulate the slowing economy. Ever wonder where the money is actually coming from? Is it just being printed, which would be purely inflationary? Is it being borrowed from China along with the money we're borrowing to buy Mid-Eastern oil, and to finance our conventional wars? It's no accident that the dollar's value has plummeted.

Vantage Point

A Review by Gary Kaufman

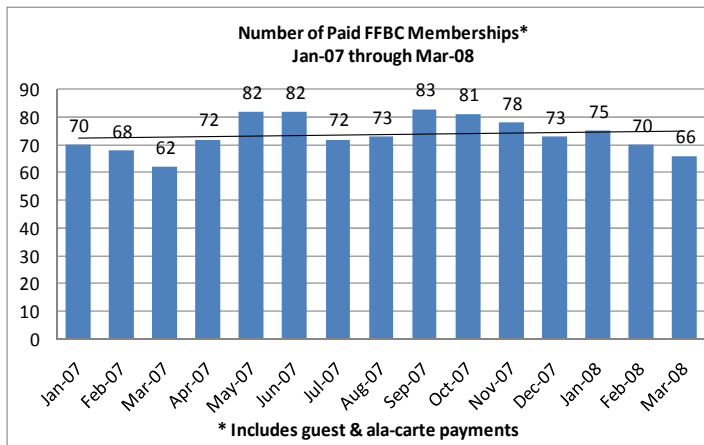


Vantage Point's use of time is reminiscent of such films as Memento and Groundhog Day. Vantage Point replays the same segment of real time over and over again, but each time the segment is shown

from the vantage point of a different person or group. The event is the culmination of U. S. President Ahston's career, a peace conference in Spain in which the countries of the world will agree to put an end to terrorism. Obviously the event is one that would invite terrorists and, sure enough, the President (William Hurt) is shot at a public plaza followed by several large explosions.

First is the viewpoint of a female television producer for the Global News Network, Rex Brooks (Sigourney Weaver), who presides as the event unfolds under the watchful eye of her many cameras, from many angles. Next the event is shown from the viewpoint of Thomas Barnes (Dennis Quaid), a secret service agent who is on the force for the first time since he took a bullet for the President, and who is very nervous about being back on the job. Then from the viewpoint of Enrique (Eduardo Noriega), a local policeman assigned to protect the mayor of the town; then from the viewpoint of Howard Lewis (Forest Whitaker), a black American tourist who is filming all the action at the event with his handheld camera; then from the viewpoint of the President; and finally from the viewpoint of the terrorists. At the conclusion of each vision of what occurred, the film goes backward with flashes of moments that were just witnessed, and then begins again at noon on the day of the shooting going forward in time from another viewpoint. Although there are so many of these rewinds that it gets a tad exhausting or tedious to the viewer, each vision forward gives new information until the viewer begins to understand the connections between all these characters, and each vision is progressively exciting. Sometimes the viewpoint leads to an erroneous conclusion, but by the final run through all the pieces intersect and fit. It is a fascinating film exercise, and one that is well worth seeing. ▼

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I sought my soul but my soul I could not see, I sought my God, but my God eluded me; I sought my brother, and I found all three.



ATTORNEY: All your responses must be oral, OK? What school did you attend?

WITNESS: Oral.



Out of the woodwork came volunteers. Nathan Ritz volunteered to chair the effort, and we have five or six (with more welcome) who have volunteered to do data entry. Bigots can be a lot like closeted gay people; you can't generally tell just by looking at them. But then came anti-gay legislative and constitutional initiatives, and supportive petitions—petitions with names and addresses! Names and addresses of those who, in their prideful ignorance (the definition of bigotry) are the enemies of gay and lesbian children of God, their families, and their friends. Names and addresses of those who don't believe in equal rights for all law-abiding citizens. Names and addresses of those who want a qualifier to that fundamental constitutional guarantee of equality. Names and addresses of self-identified, anti-American bigots. Names and addresses of prime candidates for a lynch mob. Names and addresses of prospects for membership in the Flat Earth Society. Names and addresses of those who need to be marginalized. Names and addresses of unenlightened folks in serious need of education.

Thanks to the KnowThyNeighbor.org initiative, these folks are also going to need a dose of courage to go with their unpalatable convictions. KnowThyNeighbor.org is an on-line roster of anti-gay bigots, state-by-state, and searchable, drawn from a variety of petitions supporting anti-gay legislative and constitutional initiatives. Iowa is going to join the effort starting with the 6000-plus names and addresses appearing on a petition supporting a state constitutional amendment designed to deny access of same-gender couples to equal rights historically reserved to serially married and occasionally monogamous heterosexuals.

People certainly have the right to be bigots, to express their ignorance, and to advocate for legislation to enshrine in the constitution their 1st Century view of the world. But no more in Iowa will they be able to do that with relative anonymity. Gone are the days when people can, in near-obscurity, mindlessly go to church or to the front door and sign some hate-filled petition and expect no one they know to know about it—expect no consequences. Now the self-identified bigots are pushing themselves out of the woodwork by signing such petitions, and KnowThyNeighbor.org is going to make a very public record of who they are and what they've done.

Watch for it on line and thanks to the volunteers who are inputting the data. ▼

There is nothing more dangerous than stupid people who believe they are smart.

A Sobering Story of the Abuse of Power

by Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker in March was State Senator (and FFBC member) Matt McCoy, who gave us an account of his frustrating two-year battle against an unjust and personally motivated prosecution—in which he finally (but expensively, both to his pocket and his professional reputation) triumphed. You can read all the gory details in the *Register*.



Matt McCoy

Suffice to say: it's a harrowing tale, beginning with an early-morning visit to Matt's home by the FBI, continuing with a quick Grand Jury indictment, then testimony from an FBI-wired and paid witness who "couldn't recall" over 200 times what he had sworn to that produced the indictment, and finally an acquittal that took under an hour of deliberation.

It was all part of the Bush administration's campaign to co-opt the Justice Department nationwide from the grass roots, presided over by since-discredited—if not yet totally disgraced—Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, working in this case through his protégée, the local U.S. Attorney, Matthew Whitaker.

Senator McCoy emphasized two general points about his unhappy experience: (1) Always remember that you—still!—have a right to counsel, and (2) The Grand Jury process can be too easily manipulated by an errant prosecutor with an agenda.

(Fortunately, Matt was able to engage the talents of the Montgomery Brown law firm, which made short if costly work of the accusations. President Jonathan Wilson invited contributions from fellow FFBC members to the law firm on Matt's behalf.)

It was a sobering story. ▼

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the April 4 meeting no later than April 1 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com. He can also be reached by phone at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Mike Colwell, Executive Director of Business Innovation Zone.

Thanks to Eric Burmeister for his introduction of our March speaker, State Senator Matt McCoy.

Archived issues of the FFBC newsletter are available on our web site: www.ffbc-iowa.org.



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From the Editor

“What Ever Happened to Class?”

Sunday, February 24, I went to an Oscar party at the home of some friends. The party was quite enjoyable, but the sordid spectacle that is Hollywood can only be topped by the even more vulgar exhibitionism known as Las Vegas. The “pre-game” parade, “The Red Carpet,” features hundreds of television cameras and journalists trying to stake out their few scarlet threads in order to get one-upmanship on some equally tedious rival. The most frequently bandied question to some vapid personality is, “Who are you wearing?” I keep hoping that some quick-witted individual will have the guts to say, “Oh, this is just something my elderly mother whipped up on her sewing machine two nights ago.” I doubt we will ever see that.

If the “pre-game” weren’t dreary enough, the goings-on in the Kodak Theatre were just as bad. The slate of pictures nominated for “Best Picture” had to be one of the most depressing lists of films ever to make an appearance at the Academy Awards. It was downright painful to watch the film clips of movies that purportedly represent the best that Hollywood had to offer. If movies are supposed to reflect the culture in which they are made, we are in dire trouble, indeed—which we may well be, given the current state of political affairs in this country—but that’s another story. The truth is that Hollywood really doesn’t exist any longer. Oh, there are studios and sound stages and writers and directors and film editors, etc. But there are no longer any movie stars. All those appearing in films today want to be called “actors.” That is all well and good, I suppose, but I do miss the glamour and glitz that used to be.

A few evenings after the Oscar party I attended, I was watching television, and there came on a movie that had treachery; backstabbing; evil; bitchery; and, above all, good writing. Not a drop of blood was spilled in this picture nor one word of vulgar language uttered. No one was maimed or killed. It even had real Hollywood movie stars in it, and they could act, too! How, possibly, could this film have won six Academy Awards? By today’s standards it would probably be a flop. The film was **All About Eve**, and it should, to my way of thinking, had won a seventh Oscar for its star, Bette Davis. The award that year went to Judy Holliday in **Born Yesterday**. Such is the way with Oscar. He frequently goes to someone less deserving although I would never say that about Judy Holliday. One other remarkable appearance in **All About Eve** was a bit part played by Marilyn Monroe. A person could see even from that brief scene that here was someone the camera loved. That doesn’t happen frequently, but occasionally a Clara Bow or Rudolph Valentino or Audrey Hepburn comes along, and there can be no mistaking how the movie camera takes to that individual. Katharine Hepburn said it best in an interview in the 1970s with Dick Cavett. When asked about her star appeal, she said, “I don’t know what it is, but I’ve got it.” And she did. Unfortunately, I can’t think of a single person in the movies today who has “it.” Even the act of going to the movies has diminished. Today we are stuck with postage-stamp screens in multiplex cinemas, and none of the great movie palaces of yore are available to us in this area. What a shame! One can only hope that we have reached the nadir of the movie business and that someday it will be a pleasure once again to go to the movies. In the meantime, I’ll watch mine at home.

—Steve Person