



*THE
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OF THE
FIRST FRIDAY
BREAKFAST CLUB, INC.*

First Friday News & Views

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CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, January 6 @ Hoyt Sherman Place.

The speaker will be Carolyn Washburn, Vice President and Editor of The Des Moines Register.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, January 3 to <Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com> or 288-2500 by phone.

Native American Swindle: Revisited

by Jonathan Wilson

A few years ago I attended a briefing at the White House, or so it was labeled. It actually took place in a building next door after a White House tour. Labels and reality often diverge in the vicinity of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Take, for example, the US trade deficit that is now running at a rate of almost one trillion dollars a year. There was a purported trade deficit of more modest, but still alarming, proportions at the time of my briefing. To my surprise, however, we were told that there really wasn't a trade deficit. There still isn't. We were told that there can't be a trade deficit except in the abstract. In reality, trade and financial exchanges between trading countries always stay roughly in balance. How can that be?

As it was explained to us, when we import more goods and services than we export, our foreign trading partners have "extra" dollars to spend, and they spend them. They spend them by investing in US Treasury Bills, and receive a right to interest on their money as well as the right to call the loan when it suits them. The Chinese, Japanese, and South Koreans currently hold the lion's share of those T-Bills. Since 1980, the US has shifted from a net creditor nation at \$350 billion to a net debtor nation in 2000 to the tune of \$1.7 trillion, and it's only gotten worse since then. Does anyone seriously think such a debtor-creditor relationship exists in isolation and has no broader public policy implications? Not. When did you last think seriously about picking a fight with someone from whom you wanted to borrow more money?



JONATHAN WILSON

Our trading partners also spend their "extra" dollars on buying assets in the United States. The most recent example has been the bid by a Chinese-backed company to buy the US oil company Unocal. Other examples abound. Foreigners now own \$8.6 trillion in US assets, 93% of our Gross Domestic Product. That's up from 22.2 % of GDP in 1982. I don't understand all the hubbub about such purchases. In the final analysis, whether foreign countries buy our T-Bills or acquire US companies, either way they

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own us.

It reminds me of the early pilgrims in America. They gave the Native Americans trinkets like beads and mirrors, and the Native Americans gave them “Pennsylvania” in return. Having not learned from history, we get to repeat it, but this time with the tables turned. Our trading partners are giving us TVs and RVs, calculators and computers, phones and photo equipment, oil and oil products, and we give them US assets ranging from energy and manufacturing, to T-bills, to you-name-it. The Bush administration pushed to increase from 25% to 49% the permissible share of US airlines that can be foreign-owned.

We’re mortgaging the future of our children and grandchildren. Not the mark of a great nation destined to preserve its greatness. We’re selling off our real estate, natural resources, and principal enterprises of production. Not the mark of a wealthy nation destined to preserve its wealth. We’re surrendering control of the terms and conditions of our employment. Not the mark of a free nation bound to remain free. When a Republican-controlled Congress gives tax breaks and deficit spends, the money to make the books balance comes from borrowing from ourselves through the Social Security Trust Fund Reserves and borrowing from foreign countries. The political hacks are hocking the future. The ownership society touted by President Bush turns out to be *foreign* ownership of our society.

—Jonathan Wilson

Speaker Review

December’s guest speaker, Mark Stringer, chairs the board of The Interfaith Alliance of Iowa & Action Fund www.iowatia.org, an advocacy group which works for civil rights, non-discrimination, and the mutual independence of religious and governmental institutions. Stringer, pastor of Des Moines’s First Unitarian Church since 2001, began by outlining the concept of “apatheism,” first articulated by the writer Jonathan Rauch in an article in the May 2003 Atlantic magazine.



Rauch’s description of the idea as “a disinclination to care all that much about one’s own religion, and an even stronger disinclination to care about other people’s”—at first appears almost ideal, said Stringer. But as you begin to think about it and to pay attention to the increasing power of the Religious Right, he said, you begin to realize that the apathy contained in “apatheism” is exactly the wrong response.

Stringer might have agreed with Edmund Burke, the famous 18th-century conservative(!) writer,

when Burke said, “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.” Stringer went on to explain his growing realization that silence amounts to no opposition whatever to the enemies of our rights. He and The Interfaith Alliance campaign tirelessly for political justice, fairness, civility, and respect.

“They had ‘no idea’ that Dobson’s self-styled religious organization was so offensive and promised Stringer that they would not, after all, be using those resources.”

Of particular interest to our group was his description of a recent interview with officials of the downtown YMCA, whose ongoing family support program announced a plan to make hefty use of materials from James Dobson’s infamously homophobic “Focus on the Family.” They had “no idea” that Dobson’s self-styled religious organization was so offensive and promised Stringer that they would not, after all, be using those resources. A win for our side! Indeed, a quick look at the Y’s Web site shows that the reference to Dobson has been removed (though there’s still a link to the FOTF site).

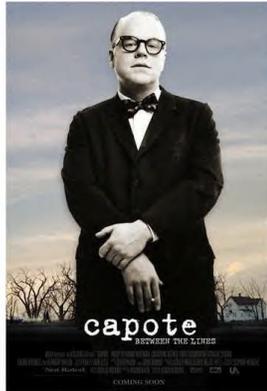
Stringer was both instructive and convincing as he showed The Interfaith Alliance to be not just another bunch of do-gooders but a strong and effective advocate for educating and mobilizing Iowa’s voters.

—Bruce Carr

capote

Review by

Gary Kaufman



Truman Capote will always be remembered by many as the uniquely voiced narrator of the television special classic, “Truman Capote’s Christmas Memory”, with Geraldine Page’s Emmy awarded performance. It’s a show that still makes me cry at the end when Ms. Page says, “It’s fruitcake weather again!” It’s about as warm and fuzzy as one could get. So to see a movie where Capote is a conniving do-anything-to-get-the-story author, was a bit of a switch. There is no doubt, however, that Philip Seymour Hoffman’s performance as Truman Capote is a shoe-in for an Oscar nomination. He captured a lot of the looks—but more than that, the mannerisms and voice patterns of Capote so accurately that it’s like seeing the person himself.

The story centers on the period of Capote’s life when he wrote **In Cold Blood**, his book about the gruesome murder of four members of a farm family in Holcomb, Kansas. Capote was between projects, spotted the story in the New York Times, and decided to write about it. The contrast between the quiet world of a farm family and the violent world of people capable of doing such heinous acts was what he ultimately achieved in his book. To do that, he first headed to Kansas, where he found people reluctant to speak to this outsider with the effeminate voice. With the help of his assistant, Harper Lee (Katherine Keener), who was about to become a Pulitzer Prize winner herself for **To Kill A Mockingbird**, he soon found folks willing to share their insights about the people involved. Until arrests were made, the locals blame “Mexicans, a whole bunch of Mexicans.” But soon, suspects Perry Smith (Clifton Collins Jr.) and Richard Hickock (Mark Pellegrino) were arrested, thanks to a cellmate turning them in for a reward.

Capote befriended Perry Smith and discovered him to be a desperately lonely man. The man’s past was similar to Capote’s in many ways. They both had been abandoned by their parents at an early age and were raised as orphans. At one point, Capote remarked that, “It’s as if we grew up in the same house, yet one day he

went out the back door as I went out the front.” Once the suspects were convicted, Capote, needing more time to get material for his book, hired an attorney to file an appeal. He continued to push Perry for a detailed account of what exactly went on that evening. He told Perry, “The world will see you as a monster. I don’t want that. Trust me.” The attorneys kept winning appeals and finally, after four years of work, Capote got Perry to tell his version of what happened that night. Perry told how he had liked the father, Herb Clutter, noting, “I thought he was a very nice, gentle man. I thought so right up until I slit his throat.” It was as if Perry didn’t know he had done this heinous act until “he could hear the blood gurgling out”. The rest of the rampage ensued.

Once Capote had his story, he needed closure. Yet, there seemed to be no end to the appeals. At one point, he became so exasperated he said, “If they win this appeal, I may have a complete nervous breakdown.”

Ultimately Capote betrayed Perry but was still strongly affected by his execution. Although his book was a phenomenal success, Capote never wrote another. He was emotionally depleted. He told his friend Harper, “There wasn’t anything I could have done to save them.” She replied, “Maybe, but the fact is, you didn’t want to.”

It is a very powerful movie, one that paints a dramatically different picture of Capote than my warm and fuzzy “Christmas Memory” memory of him.

—Gary Kaufman

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP to Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com no later than January 3 for the January 6 meeting. Jonathan can also be reached by phone at 288-2500. The January speaker will be Carolyn Washburn, Vice President and Editor of The Des Moines Register.

Thanks to Larry Schlatter for introducing our December speaker, Mark Stringer, Chair of The Interfaith Alliance of Iowa.

It’s time to pay FFBC dues either for the first calendar quarter of 2006 (\$36.00) or for the entire year 2006 (\$125).

FFBC

*First Friday
News & Views*

Des Moines, Iowa

JANUARY 2006

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From the Editor

Happy Anniversary!

January 2006 marks the tenth anniversary of The First Friday Breakfast Club. The phenomenal success of our club cannot be denied. The array of monthly speakers includes governors, lieutenant governors, the First Lady of Iowa, Iowa legislative leaders, the Iowa Secretary of State, congressional representatives, Des Moines mayors, Des Moines school superintendents, religious leaders—both local and national, human rights advocates, university presidents, newspaper and television editors and publishers, historic preservationists, etc. The list is impressive.

The FFBC has awarded \$47,000.00 in scholarships over the years to thirty-seven high school seniors who have helped to reduce homophobia in their schools and/or communities. Indeed, the FFBC scholarships have attracted statewide and national attention. Most of that attention has been positive, but even the infamous and homophobic Reverend Fred Phelps and followers were unable to disrupt—on two occasions—the scholarship presentations at the annual June meetings. Actually, the presence of the Reverend Phelps helped to fill the scholarship coffers when people pledged money to match the amount of minutes the antigay protestors spent outside the meetings.

The breakfast club's success is no accident. It is the result of the tenacious work of the officers and the many club members who have acted as board members and volunteers in other capacities since 1996. The lifeblood of the organization is its membership. The large number of members over the years represents scores of occupations of men who range in age from their twenties to their eighties.

The FFBC has expanded its Des Moines base to other clubs in eastern Iowa and Kansas City. It has been a decade of progress that most groups would envy. What the next decade will bring is anybody's guess, but if the first ten years are any indication, you can expect a spectacular decade. It makes me proud to be a member of this club, and we all deserve to congratulate each other for our success.

—Steve Person

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