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THE FREEDOM TO DIE BY GUN VIOLENCE

By Jonathan Wilson

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The nation's founders and constitutional authors were masterful in the art of crafting compromise and drafting constitutional principles. They were, however, prisoners of their time and limited by the facts existing and known to them. Case in point, the Constitution they fashioned made the president Commander in Chief of the "Army and Navy of the United States." No mention of the Air Force. There were no airplanes. The only things that flew back then were birds, hot-air balloons, and -- with a nod to Benjamin Franklin -- kites. Even so-called strict constructionists have had no apparent difficulty constitutionally recognizing the expanded US military to include the Air Force. That they get with no problem. The facts changed; military capabilities changed; the military needs of the nation changed; and no one with a brain worth two cents in change has suggested that a constitutional amendment is necessary to make the Constitution encompass those changes. Rational, contextual interpretation of the Constitution works quite satisfactorily there.

Enter the so-called debate over the right to bear arms under the Second Amendment to the US Constitution. It's short and warrants quotation: "*A well regulated Militia*, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." (Emphasis added) It was written in a time when guns were single-shot muskets. Mass murders by a lone gunman, like airplanes, did not exist. By its very terms the Amendment refers to a well regulated *militia* being necessary to the "security of a free *State*" -- not the security of a free *people*. It was to protect the State (from someone or something -- I'm coming to that), not to protect the people from the government. Whatever else you might say about the founders, they were not slouches when it came to drafting. They knew the difference between the United States and a "State," and the difference between "State" and "people."

Here some historical context might be helpful. When the Amendment was drafted, independence had already been won, the individual states were in place and functioning, and the founders were trying to find something to improve upon the Articles of Confederation. Now get this: there was slavery at that time, principally in southern states. Occasionally slaves would run away and, because of their living conditions and their sheer numbers, there was an abiding fear of a slave uprising. Individual states had "well regulated militias" in place for the purpose of hunting down runaways and protecting against a potential slave rebellion. That way individual slave owners didn't have to trouble themselves with such pursuits. In short, those well regulated militias were necessary to protect the status quo. In short, the Second Amendment is a remnant of our shameful history of slavery. Happy Black History month.

**The Constitution,
like the Bible, should
be read rationally
and *in context*.**

Gun advocates would have us believe that the debate is about the right to go hunting or the right to self-defense from intruders. Everyone, themselves included, knows better. It's not about either of those rights and no one has proposed anything that would compromise either of them. Gun advocates would have us believe it's about hunting and repelling intruders not because it is, but because it expands their base of support and masks what their take on the Second Amendment is really all about.

CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, March 1, 2013, at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines, IA.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by February 27th to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

Freedom to Die... (cont.)

Advocates for unrestricted access to assault weapons want the amendment to read: "Being necessary to maintain the freedom of the people from oppressive government, the right to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." That is, of course, *not* what the Amendment says. Not even close.

The diehards are, in truth, anarchists. Fueled and funded by fear-mongering purveyors of guns and ammo, they are convinced that there's a real threat of government oppression, and an armed citizenry is what will prevent it. The logical extension of that reasoning would support unfettered citizen access to weaponry equivalent to that used by the government. It is, after all, folly to take a mere knife to a gun fight, or a mere semi-automatic assault rifle to a fight against tanks, killer drones, chemicals, and tactical bombers. No wonder they argue so unapologetically for preserving unfettered access to those assault weapons. They see their position as a compromise!!

It would be a baby step in the right direction if we could require background checks in 100% of lawful sales; bad guys (some of whom I've heard interviewed in the continuing debate) may still be able to get guns, but it will be more difficult and more expensive. If we could eliminate assault weapons and large ammo clips, I'd be willing for the government to issue a single-shot musket to every adult citizen.

The Constitution, like the Bible, should be read rationally and *in context*. If only gun advocates would read the Second Amendment and their Bibles with the degree of enlightenment they apply to the Air Force and the Constitution. As said by James Russell Lowell, "Time makes ancient good uncouth; they would upward still and onward who would keep abreast of truth."

Sean Strub

By Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday, February 1, was Iowa native Sean Strub, writer and activist who founded *POZ* and several other magazines; a long-term HIV survivor, Strub is an outspoken advocate for the self-empowerment movement for people with HIV/AIDS.

Strub showed us the short documentary film *HIV Is Not A Crime* that he created in 2011 (available on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=iB-6blJbjc), as a prelude to outlining his campaign inaugurated last year against the long standing criminalization of HIV: The SERO Project www.theseroproject.org. He noted that a majority of states in the U.S. have enacted HIV-specific statutes (which make persons indictable upon even the suspicion of seropositivity), as well as laws through which criminal penalties for other charges can be increased if seropositivity is judged present.

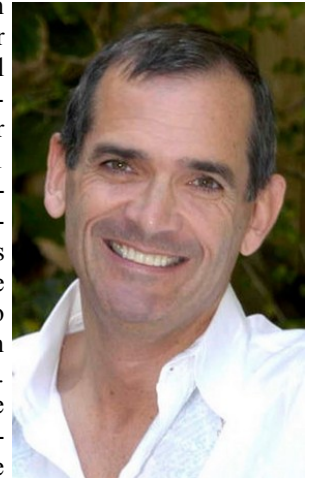
Also present at the meeting was Nick Rhoades, currently

released on appeal from a Black Hawk County five-year jail sentence for an HIV "crime," who spoke briefly about his case. Rhoades is one of the three interviewees in Strub's film.

Listeners in the room paid close attention as Strub went on to discuss the current legal dangers of disclosing HIV status: "Take the test and risk arrest" is, unfortunately, a powerful slogan. We need to contact legislators and urge their action to de-criminalize HIV, to repeal laws created in the fearful and ignorant last decades of the last century, and thus make honesty a considerable option. Strub also talked about HIV transmission, pointing to studies which show that viral load is the key marker here: a person whose viral load is undetectable *cannot* transmit the virus, he said.

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Sean Strub, a pioneer expert in mass-marketed fundraising for LGBT equality, began his political career as a page in the Iowa legislature. He was a long-time member of ACT UP in New York. In 1981 Strub persuaded playwright Tennessee Williams to sign the first fundraising letter for the Human Rights Campaign Fund, and in 1989 he asked pop artist Keith Haring to create a logo and poster to launch HRC's National Coming Out Day. In 1990, he ran for the U.S. House of Representatives -- the first openly HIV+ candidate for federal office in the U.S., and in 1991 he was one of the AIDS activists who erected a giant condom over then-US Senator Jesse Helms's house in suburban Washington. In 1992 Strub produced the off-Broadway play *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*, written by and starring David Drake. In 2009 he was president of Cable Positive, the cable and telecommunications industry's AIDS response; in 2010 he helped launch the Positive Justice Project at the Center for HIV Law & Policy; and in 2012 he founded The SERO Project.



Strub is also a co-owner of the historic Hotel Fauchere (www.hotelfauchere.com), a luxury boutique hotel in Milford, Pennsylvania, where he lives. The hotel was founded in 1852 and restored in 2006. Strub's books include **Rating America's Corporate Conscience** (Addison-Wesley, 1985), a guide to corporate social responsibility, and **Cracking the Corporate Closet** (HarperBusiness, 1995).

He who cannot love must learn to flatter. Goethe

Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead. Benjamin Franklin

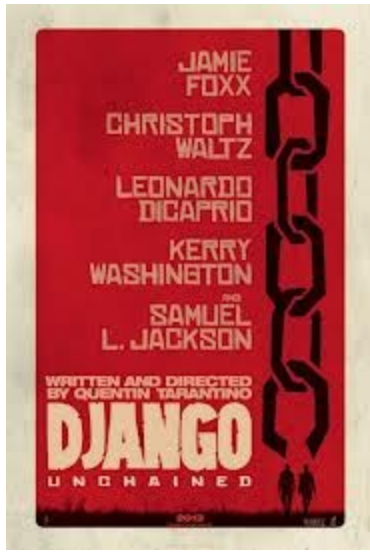


A fool hath no dialogue within himself; the first thought carrieth him without the reply of a second.
George Savile

Django Unchained

Review By Gary Kaufman

Django Unchained is, in my opinion, Quentin Tarantino's best film to date. Set in 1858, two years before the Civil War, we find our hero Django (Jamie Foxx) harshly chained by the ankles to other fugitive slaves. Their entourage comes upon a lone dentist, Dr. King Schultz (Christoph Waltz), traveling in his quaint little horse-drawn



dental wagon complete with a giant molar on a spring bouncing around as it travels down the road. But Dr. Schultz is not there on dental business, but wishes to buy Django from his current owners. After a brief negotiation period he is successful at obtaining Django. It was then that Django discovers that the doctor had given up the dental practice but now has a new much more lucrative business, that of a bounty hunter. The doctor initially offers Django his freedom if he would help identify the murderous Brittle brothers, but soon that expands into having a partnership. "I get paid for shooting white people, what's not to like about that!" Django exclaims. It also seems so strangely topical, as we are now discussing whether America should be killing American citizens in foreign countries with drones when those citizens are believed to be helping foreigners in a war against the United States, without allowing those American citizens to have any trial. Back in this period anyone could just go up and shoot you dead anywhere, no questions asked. Just give the guys their reward money!

This subject matter would probably be too grotesque in other people's hands, but with the acting skills of Christoph Waltz, armed with the wit and clever tongue fueled by Quentin Tarantino's writing, the Dr. King Schultz character becomes a silver-tongued gentleman who can just about talk himself out of any tense situation he encounters; yet those who do listen need to be careful because the doctor can become quite lethal should you have a momentary mental lapse. This character reminded me of those of Gene Wilder at his greatest, and was a real

joy to encounter. The film is in the style of a Sergio Leone spaghetti western (**For a Fistful of Dollars** and **The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly**), and is saddled with perhaps the worst title song ever recorded (don't worry, the songs get better). But it also depicts the horror of slavery better than any film I have ever seen. To be in a situation where one person is another person's "property" that may be disposed of any way the owner decides, no questions asked, is just ghastly, especially when the owners are sadistic butchers enjoying their power over people they regard as subhuman, inherently, genetically below them.

Oh, I know it wouldn't be a Quentin Tarantino film without some blood spattering or two, but in this film it is over the top, and the fact that this is happening to people who are really horrid human beings to begin with actually makes it funny. If one of the bad guys gets shot again in the leg with additional hunks of meat flying about, while other gunmen are using other bodies as shields, it becomes humorous – or has my brain been warped by seeing too many Quentin Tarantino movies? Anyway, I think you will find it funny; the movie has an incredibly original sto-

(Continued on page 4)

When a flat-earth knuckle dragger announces he's softening his rhetoric on the subject for political reasons because the majority believe the earth is round, does that make him less dangerous? He's still a knuckle dragger. When a right wing ideologue says he's softening his rhetoric in opposition to gay marriage. . .

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the March 1 meeting no later than February 27th. Email JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Greg Gross of the Central Iowa AIDS Project.



Thanks to Dan Johnston for his introduction of our February speaker, Sean Strub.



Consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the FFBC Scholarship Fund.



Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. Book donations are always welcome. Thanks to Barry McGriff for coordinating the book exchange



The FFBC Story

By Jonathan Wilson

The First Friday Breakfast Club, Inc. was formed in 1996. It's a 501(c)(3) entity, an association of gay and bisexual men, and the largest breakfast club in the state of Iowa. In addition to monthly meetings for mutual support, networking, and learning from distinguished speakers, FFBC gives scholarships to Iowa high school students who have taken notable actions to reduce homophobia and educate on LGBT issues in their schools and communities. As of this year, it will have awarded more than \$150,000 in scholarships. Scholarships are awarded regardless of gender, gender orientation, or gender identity. FFBC also publishes this monthly newsletter of articles written by members. Its central mission is education, particularly (but not exclusively) relating to LGBT issues. Bigotry is prideful ignorance; education attacks bigotry at its very core.

Its mission and core values have remained consistent since its inception. The notable changes have been in the lives that FFBC has touched and influenced. FFBC has been particularly meaningful in helping men with the changes that come with coming out in more and more aspects of their lives. Over time FFBC has come to be seen as an important interface between the larger community and the gay community, primarily in central Iowa.

FFBC has had a profound impact in three ways: First, it creates a uniquely supportive environment for gay and bisexual men to learn about themselves and current issues on a wide range of topics. Second, it serves to educate our special guest speakers who have typically never witnessed so many unapologetic, well-adjusted gay and bisexual men in one place, in broad daylight, and without smoking or alcohol around. Third, when our members go to Iowa high school graduations to present our scholarships, they often do so before audiences who ignorantly think they've never before see a gay person in real life.

Many hands have made light work in keeping the organization vibrant, fiscally sound, and always growing. Of particular note is perhaps the contribution of Iowa Senator Matt McCoy who is openly gay, a member of FFBC, and a re-elected member of the Iowa Senate. Such role models serve to educate, without even trying.

One year we had the distinction of being protested by "Rev." Fred Phelps of "God Hates Fags" fame. We initiated a fundraiser called Phelps Helps because taking the P out of Phelps, helps. With this initiative, enlightened people in our community pledged varying amounts of money for every minute Phelps protested. That approach cele-

brated the exercise of his First Amendment rights and raised more than \$20,000 for FFBC scholarships. On the day of our meeting that year our members and guests were safe and warm inside at Hoyt Sherman Place, while a gentle cold rain fell on Phelps and his protesting ilk. The Lord works in mysterious ways.

FFBC meets monthly on the first Friday at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th and Woodland, Des Moines. We begin at 7:00 a.m. (it's a *breakfast* club). The meetings feature open-seating and a buffet breakfast. The speaker is introduced around 7:30, makes prepared remarks, and often leaves some time for Q & A. We conclude by 8:00 or shortly thereafter. Attire is whatever members and guests will be wearing that day. New members and guests are always welcome. First time attendees pay \$12.



Django (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

ry line; it has great stylized action sequences; and is, in the end, an heroic tale. I highly recommend seeing **Django Unchained**, but you might want ear plugs or an airplane barf bag for that opening song. It is worth the suffering, the rest is an absolute joy!

A wise man hears one word and understands two.

Coming out with timidity invites rebuke.

Whoever gossips to you will gossip of you. Spanish proverb.

From the Pastor's Pen An Encounter with the Evangelicals

By Rev. Jonathan Page

Ping! My iPhone sounded, telling me I had a new text message. I glanced at the glowing screen. "Would you come to Salt on Thursday? They are having a talk on homosexuality." I winced. I had planned on doing other things with my Thursday night. I texted back, "Sure. What time?" The response, "8pm." "OK" With those few texts I had agreed to go to Cornerstone Church's weekly worship for their ISU student group, called the Salt Company. Cornerstone is a classic evangelical church, loosely affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, and the student who texted me is gay and regularly attends their services. "This is going to be interesting," I thought to myself.

I knew I was at the right place when there was a traffic jam to get into the parking lot. Jogging through the freezing temperatures, I was greeted by enthusiastic college students who must have wondered why a 33-year-old guy in a button-down Oxford and a sport coat was there. Close to a thousand students packed the sanctuary, although sanctuary is an odd term for a theater with a rock band on stage. There were no permanent objects like a cross to distinguish this holy space from the Civic Center. Fancy lighting. Big flat screen monitors up front. I was definitely in evangelical land.

After a couple of Christian rock songs, the preacher, dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt, strode on stage. The sermon title appeared on the screen behind him, "Singleness." He read 1 Corinthians 7, the passage where the Apostle Paul urges the Corinthians to be celibate, if at all possible. In a dubious interpretation of the text, the preacher claimed that "obviously" heterosexual marriage is the preferred estate. But, he insisted, some of the lucky few are called to celibacy, and celibacy is also blessed by God. Since God gave his only son for you, God loves you whether you have found that special someone of the opposite sex, or not. It had to be one of the most disingenuous sermons that I have ever heard from a Southern Baptist, a denomination that worships straight marriage. What he meant to say is that if you are gay, you should be celibate, and if you're straight, you should be married by age 22 lest you fall into the sin of premarital sex.

A fifteen-minute break separated the worship service from the lecture on homosexuality. The presenter opened with a clip from "For the Bible Tells Me So," which described in cartoon form how homosexuality was natural and how our sexual orientation, whether gay or straight, was not a choice. "This," the presenter said, "is just what our secular society wants you to believe: that homosexuality is natural and therefore from God. But we know better." He proceeded to read from Romans 1:18-26. "You can see from this passage that homosexuality is a

result of our Fallen World. Same sex relations are sinful. There is no doubt about it. Now, of course, it would appear that some people are more pre-disposed to same sex attraction than others. But this is not an excuse for sinful conduct. Troy [the lead pastor at Cornerstone] is more predisposed to lose his temper and become angry, but that does not make it right. That is his sin he must resist, just as gays must resist theirs."

The presentation ended and the speaker asked if there were any questions. No one stirred. Finally, I stood up and walked to the microphone. "My name is Jonathan Page. I am a Christian minister here in town and I would like to add that there are faithful Christians who disagree with what has just been presented. If you want to talk about it, you can find me afterward." As I walked back to my seat, the tension in the room spiked. After a couple of harmless questions from the students, the program ended. A few minutes later, a crowd began to gather around me. There was not much space in the aisle of the auditorium, and soon I was surrounded by more than fifty people. Apparently, it was my turn to respond.

"If you read Romans 1," I started, "you will find that Paul says same sex intercourse is a penalty for idolatry. It is an example of the wrath of God. Do you actually believe that? Do you believe that someone is gay because they are idolaters? The fact is that Paul's conceptions of sexuality, considered in its broadest terms, is radically different from our own, and the notion that anyone would be naturally attracted to someone of the same sex would have been completely alien to Paul. We have no problem updating the biblical view on the natural world in light of modern science. Why not do the same thing with human sexuality?" Needless to say, my words sparked a modicum of controversy. The heated discussion followed well-worn lines, and we each offered salvos in our defense. After a half-hour of contentious debate, we agreed that it was time to depart.

The whole incident left me pretty shaken. It is not easy arguing about something so personal, especially in a hostile setting outnumbered fifty-to-one. My only hope is that some student, struggling with his sexuality, heard that maybe God thinks it is okay to be gay. God might actually love him for who he is.

FFBC member Jonathan Page is senior pastor of the Ames United Church of Christ, 217 6th Street, Ames, Iowa. Sunday service at 10:45. He can be reached at jon@Amesucc.org.



Words, like eyeglasses, blur everything that they do not make more clear. Joseph Joubert

Sometimes we think we dislike flattery, but it is only the way it is done that we dislike. Francois, Duc de La Rochefoucauld



FFBC

*First Friday
News & Views
Des Moines, Iowa*

MARCH 2013

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My M.O. (Monthly Observations)

A Gentleman for All Seasons

By Steve Person

If you haven't seen the film **Quartet**, you've missed what is frequently referred to as "a damned good show!" I remember that phrase from so many years ago when I was involved with the now-defunct Drama Workshop. Dr. Curtis Page, professor of English at Drake University and a great teacher, raconteur, actor, storyteller, and board member of the Workshop introduced to the young me in the late 1960s and early 1970s so many anecdotes about the Theatre. Curt was Yale-educated and a transplant from Massachusetts. His enthusiasm for life was infectious, and whether I was involved in acting with him onstage or being directed by him in a play, rehearsals never ceased to be entertaining. It was, if I remember correctly, during his direction of Shaw's **Saint Joan** that he digressed into one of his stories.

It seems that a rather self-satisfied, pseudo-urbane, and superior-minded professor at a prestigious college struck up a conversation with the custodian in the building where the professor had his office. The menial worker was a man of little education and limited vocabulary. The professor, in an effort to cement his self-image as an erudite teacher of literature, invited the custodian to a production of **Hamlet** being staged by the college's drama department. The custodian accepted the invitation and sat through the performance with the professor, never uttering a word during the entire performance. The professor, sure that Shakespeare's iambic pentameter and lofty themes of the play went far over the custodian's head, asked the man at the play's conclusion what he thought. Not missing a beat, the custodian replied, "Damned good show!" Better praise for **Hamlet** could never be said.

And speaking of Curt Page, I would be remiss if I did not emphasize his sense of humor and quick wit. During one of the rehearsals of **Saint Joan** (which, by the way, had his wife Teri in the leading role—one of many times Curt did that as director), a stage direction written by Shaw during a scene in the Dauphin of France's castle stated, "A titter runs across the court." Curt, with his glasses perched on the tip of his nose and smoking one of his signature Tareyton cigarettes, stopped the rehearsal and burst out laughing as he pointed out that phrase to the actors involved. He saw in it a double entendre.

If Curt liked what an actor was doing onstage, he would invariably give that person a boost of self-confidence by saying, "Elegant! Elegant!" He didn't have to say anything further. Likewise, Curt was a gentleman of the first degree, and, as a theatregoer, he was often asked when he went backstage after a show what he thought. Never one to utter a slur if he had just witnessed a particularly bad production, he would simply say, "Interesting. You should have been out front." That reply was worth more than one interpretation!

What started me thinking about Curt and all those wonderful rehearsals, opening nights, and stories was what he told us actors before we went onstage. "Remember that Theatre is where you perform with others for the benefit of the audience and mankind. No other endeavor can match that." That sentiment is exactly one of the themes of **Quartet** with its emphasis on growing old with dignity and yes, elegance. Curt would have liked that.

When you get to a certain age, you've been around the block enough that you recognize a corner when see one. J. Wilson & S. Person
