

**FFBC**

# First Friday News & Views

Monthly Newsletter of the First Friday Breakfast Club, Inc.

January 2018

Volume 23

Issue 1

The next FFBC meeting is  
Friday, January 5,  
2018  
7:00 a.m.



FFBC Meeting Location:  
Hoyt Sherman Place,  
15<sup>th</sup> and Woodland,  
Des Moines, IA



R.S.V.P.

JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com

or phone

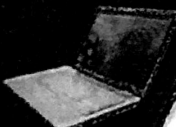
(515) 288-2500

by Wednesday,

January 3.



FFBC Website:  
[www.ffbcowa.org](http://www.ffbcowa.org)



## Lies, Lies, and More Lies

by Jonathan Wilson

We are being lied to. We're being fed talking points by Republicans saying that there need to be *permanent* tax breaks for the wealthy and employers to stimulate job creation. We're being told that employers create jobs and giving tax breaks to them that will improve their bottom line will, in turn, prompt them to create jobs and increase wages. We're being told that the resulting economic stimulation and growth will largely offset the cost of those tax giveaways.

These are all lies, every one of them.

Employers don't create jobs. Demand creates jobs.

Truth be known -- and it is -- employers first try as best they can to avoid new hires and avoid increasing wages. When demand increases, employers try to squeeze as much additional productivity as they can out of the existing workforce. They try to avoid raising wages so long as there is an adequate labor supply to suppress the exit of productive employees. In short, they try to maximize productivity at the lowest possible cost, thus increasing company profits.

Get this: legally, they are required to act this way. Corporate officers have a fiduciary *duty* to act this way for the sake of corporate shareholders. Corporate officers are obligated to do exactly the opposite of what Republicans are saying they will do if given *permanent* tax breaks. And, under our economic system, corporate officers can expect to be rewarded with increased compensation in the form of bonuses or otherwise if, and only if, they do exactly the opposite of what Republicans are saying those corporate decision-makers will do.

Corporate officers don't run companies altruistically for the sake of the larger economy, for the sake of the common good, for the sake of the country, or for the sake of keeping jobs here "just because" if the jobs can be done more cheaply overseas. Corporate officers run private-sector companies for the sake of profit! It's that pure and that simple, and it's true.



[continued on page two]

["Lies, Lies, and More Lies" / continued from page one]

Don't think for a moment that Republicans don't understand this. They know full-well what they're trying to do. They know they're lying. The proof: they approached things differently when they were genuinely serious about spurring the economy and not just further enriching the rich. In February 2008, during the administration of Republican George W. Bush, the Economic Stimulus Act of 2008 was enacted when the country was flirting with a recession. That bill authorized a tax rebate of \$152 BILLION divvied up among about 130 million ordinary Americans "in the hope that they will spend it and boost a faltering economy." (CNN)

It works like this: if you put more money in the hands of folks in the middle class and below, they will be more likely than the rich to spend it in the United States on goods and services here. They will be more likely to go to Target, Walmart, Sears, Kmart, Menards, Home Depot, Costco, wherever, and spend the money on "whatever" goods and services. That kind of spending shrinks supplies of those goods and services and creates demand that ripples through all those employers whose companies provide the goods and services.

When that demand takes hold, and employers can't squeeze any more productivity from their existing labor force, they will -- reluctantly even -- hire more people, pay their existing employees "retention premium wages," or both. That, in turn, puts more money in the hands of those who are most likely to spend it on goods and services -- and so forth. Economic growth and greater prosperity for middle and lower socioeconomic citizens follows.

Employers don't create jobs. Demand creates jobs. Therein lies the compelling reason to make *permanent* the tax breaks for those in the middle-class and lower. Making those tax breaks permanent will mean that the increase in demand will be more reliably sustainable both immediately and in the longer term.



Trickle down, "voodoo" economics will grow the gap between rich and poor in favor of the rich -- of course. It won't trickle down.

Genuine economic growth comes not from stimulus trickling down; it comes from stimulus percolating up!

January's  
Speaker:

☒ Mark Your  
Calendar

**Matt McCoy**

Our speaker in January will be Iowa  
State Senator (and FFBC member)  
Matt McCoy.



You won't want to miss. You are  
also encouraged to invite some  
of your friends to attend!!

*"It's not easy taking  
our problems one at a  
time when they refuse  
to get in line."*

-- Ashleigh Brilliant

# Some Thanks and Hope

by Ryan Crane

*Hope*



Lately I have reflected on what the next generation will inherit. It is easy to be shocked and disappointed and frustrated -- regularly, I might add -- but one area where the next generation will undoubtedly be more fortunate than the last is on matters of LGBTQ equality.

Many of the men who regularly attend First Friday Breakfast Club were culture warriors, on the cutting edge of a community and class of people who were seen as less-than and unworthy of what might be called a "normal" life. They boldly and publicly fought for inclusion, for dignity, and for a legitimized place in society, and they were often ostracized and even fired (or not re-elected) for it.

Another group of FFBC attendees is important in a different way: that group attempted to integrate and marry and have kids. Theirs is a special and complicated journey that resulted in altered relationships with their children, drama, divorce, and sometimes heartache.

But it is on this generation's shoulders that the next one stands.

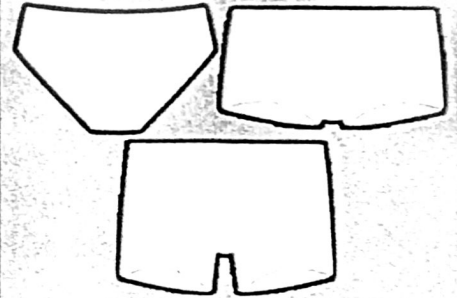
# PRIDE!

Because of the work done and the trails blazed by the 50-, 60-, and 70-somethings that primarily attend First Friday Breakfast Club, the next generation can come out more easily, earlier, and face fewer repercussions and dissent when they do.

So even though we are living through some scary times, I am truly heartened by the idea that much of the work that has been done to secure a safer and happier future for young LGBTQ kids...has been done by members of First Friday Breakfast Club!

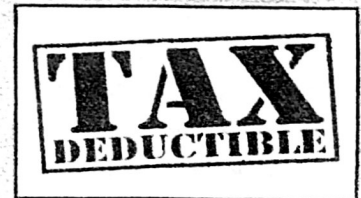
And for that, my generation and all generations after mine, are and will be perpetually grateful.

## Briefs & Shorts:



Thanks to Michael Thompson for introducing our December speaker, Rev. Matt Mardis-LeCroy, senior pastor at the Plymouth Congregational Church in Des Moines. Thanks to Brian Taylor Carlson for his work on the FFBC website. Thanks to Wade Petersen for his work as our newsletter production editor. Thanks to Ryan Weidner for his work as our technology guru.

Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. Book donations are always welcome. Thanks to Scott Kuknyo for helping coordinate the book exchange.



Consider a tax deductible contribution to the FFBC scholarship fund, or a tax exempt testamentary gift, or both. We're all going to die, and we can't take it with us. Contact Jonathan Wilson for details.

# 2018



# Tribes and Local Culture in Africa

by Allen Vander Linden and Michael Thompson

In October, we spent nearly three weeks in Ethiopia and Kenya. Our tour was through Intrepid Travel, a tour company that we had previously used, which focuses on involving small groups into local cultures. Our group consisted of six tourists plus a coordinator/driver, and a knowledgeable Ethiopian guide. Rarely did we see another white person besides the eight of us.

Although it was not the primary focus of our trip, we booked a short safari in Kenya. We were able to view a large variety of African wildlife. While most of the animals we had already seen in zoos, coming upon large herds of animals in the thousands of acres of the Masai Mara National Reserve was amazing. We realized that in the wild, animals are often social, roaming with not only their kind but also with different species as well; for example, zebras with giraffes and gazelles. Something that we had not thought about was seeing the remains of animals killed by predators. Often, we saw ground covered with bones in small pieces and, obviously, very old. Other times we saw a whole skeleton largely intact. Once we saw a dead animal where the killer was absent, apparently having taken all the meat it desired. Dozens of vultures were cleaning up; one was pulling rapaciously at the tongue.

Our first tribal village was a Masai tribe in Kenya. The guide was the son of the village chief and had gone away to be educated, including learning English. There was no school in the village, so most kids receive no education, assuring centuries old traditions don't change. About 10 young men dressed in bright traditional wraps and skirts (and others with no shirts) performed a tribal welcoming dance. That dance was the same used in welcoming a bride, always from a different village and arranged by parents. It is also used to welcome young men as they return from the bush. A tradition of this tribe is for fifteen-year-old boys to go out to the bush to learn to hunt and survive. After five years they can return, but it must be with a dead male lion. They don't all return, sometimes the lion wins.



Individuals own cattle, kept in one large village herd. The herd is guarded in the village at night, surrounded by the homes/huts, to keep the cattle safe from wild animals. In the morning, the herd is taken to the bush to graze. It was hard to imagine that there was enough foliage to keep the cattle alive; they looked skinny by our standards. However, the cattle are the base of the villagers' existence. The Masi diet is milk and blood (from slaughtering) in the morning and meat in the evening.

Allen was invited into a home. First, he walked through a small room where they keep calves until they are old enough to be with the herd. Next, he entered a very dark room with two areas off that for sleeping. The parents sleep in one area (open to the central room) and the kids in the other. In this home, there were six children. He found that he could sit on a little bench in front of a small fire burning on the dirt floor. The room was maybe 10-foot square with shelves on one wall holding cooking utensils. The Masai women are responsible for food preparation and the home. That includes building the house with small tree trunks side by side and covering those with a mud and cow dung mixture and a thatched roof.

We left Kenya for the Omo Valley in the Southeast part of Ethiopia. The Omo Valley is known particularly for its timeless traditional tribal cultures. Like the Masai tribe in Kenya, they live as they have for hundreds of years, with cattle being their primary source of food. They live in round huts made from trees and branches. We walked to a small settlement a few miles into the bush. There were several huts for different wives and other family. Entering a hut required stooping way over to get in the door. Inside the dark interior was an old man (probably much younger than us) who didn't work or leave the hut anymore, and a woman. We could hardly see in the large open space because it was so dark inside.

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# Mindhunter

A Netflix Series Review by Mark Turnage



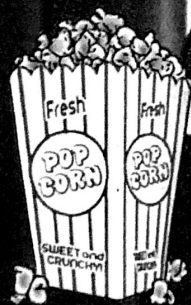
A police procedural can too often translate into “predictable.” But in the hands of director/producer David Fincher (*Fight Club*, *Se7en*, *Gone Girl*), the Netflix series *Mindhunter* focuses on that very prediction and the human toll that detective work takes. The crimes aren’t so much the focus here, it’s the personal lives of the FBI agents of a burgeoning late 1970s Behavioral Science Unit, a real-life experimental group that was created to stop a new type of criminal: serial killers.

Agent Holden Ford (in a captivating breakout performance from Jonathan Groff) is a rookie FBI agent disillusioned by the world around him. The Son of Sam killings have convinced him that a new method is needed to stop violent crime, but his traditionalist FBI Unit Chief, Shepard (Cotter Smith), believes a formalist approach is needed to develop that method. Ford is connected with veteran FBI agent Bill Tench (Holt McCalleny), and behavioral pathologist Dr. Wendy Carr (Anna Torv), for the purpose of interviewing captured serial killers so as to detect and prevent their types of crimes. It’s *The Silence of the Lambs* meets *Zodiac*, another of Fincher’s works that delves into the human cost of obsession and, ironically, that’s the commonality that Ford, the journalists in *Zodiac*, and even the criminals Ford and Tench interview share.

As Ford says towards the end of the series, “If you want truffles, you have to get in the dirt with the pigs,” meaning that if the method for stopping serial killers is to be mined, they have to be understood on their level, a tactic that requires an emotional distance that Ford may have too much of. His interactions with his girlfriend, Tench’s interactions with his wife and son, and the hidden inner world of Dr. Carr, emphasize the burden of being detectives without peers and without resorting to maudlin stereotypes. The scenes with their respective homes are some of the most telling about the humanity (or vanishing humanity) that motivates or threatens them.

This show isn’t a “whodunit,” it’s a “whydoit,” examining not just the pathological motivations of real-life killers like Speck, Brudos, and Kemper (each engrossingly portrayed by breakout actors), but the motivations of the detectives who try to stop more monsters from being made. Ed Kemper’s (Cameron Britton) arc, especially, concludes with a beautifully orchestrated suspense scene that’s both intense and rewarding, and relies completely on character.

For those leery about the time commitment to watch a television series, *Mindhunter* is very short by comparison--nine episodes make up its first season. More drama than suspense, it’s a telling look inside the mental cost of becoming a true detective.



## MINDHUNTER

# A Proud History and Future Challenge

by Bruce Carr



Our guest speaker on Friday morning, December 1, 2017, was the Rev. Matt Mardis-LeCroy, Senior Minister at Plymouth Congregational Church of Christ in Des Moines. Well known to the FFBC – many of whose members attend Plymouth – Mardis-LeCroy entertained us with a thoughtful, humorous, and encouraging account of how a fundamentalist-raised kid like himself came to be heading up one of the most progressive churches in town.

The transformation began, Matt said, in 1986 when he was ten, a geeky budding astronomer thrilled at the return of Halley's Comet – and his Sunday school teacher was insisting that the earth had been created about 6,000 years ago, in exactly six 24-hour days. Surprisingly, Matt's very religious parents encouraged him not simply to believe what he was told, but to figure out the contradictions for himself, by reading books to find answers. And even at Messiah College (where all incoming students, even in the 1990s, had to sign a contract promising not to smoke, or drink, or fornicate) he kept on reading. At Princeton Theological Seminary -- 150 miles away -- he began to meet people who did all those forbidden things and were nevertheless just as able theologians and preachers as he was. Some of them were even queer. What a revelation! So, when it came time for him to move to the Midwest (where he had never been), it was no problem to affiliate with a church which had already, for over a decade, been officially an Open and Affirming congregation.

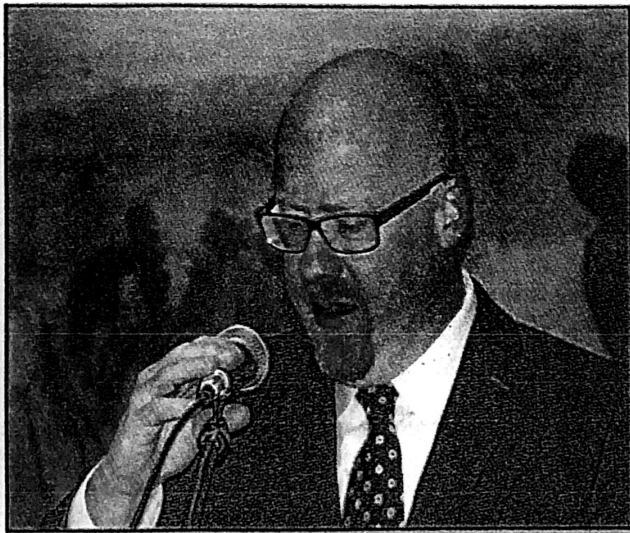


Photo by Gary Moore

Mardis-LeCroy finished his presentation with a couple of provocative propositions he's formulated during his years at Plymouth, one pretty definitive and the second more open-ended. 1) Arguing about the Bible is a waste of time. (This point is confirmed through Matt's various public encounters with representatives of the Family Research Council and others). 2) Plymouth Church must continue to expand its progressivism, as its early openness and affirmation are no longer cutting-edge, and many area churches are now welcoming to LGBTQ persons. ("Our brand is threatened," he quipped, and continued more theologically, "The Holy Spirit is now asking us, 'What have you done for me lately?'"). *Note that anyone can hear a complete audio recording of Matt's talk by going to our Website, <[ffbc-iowa.org](http://ffbc-iowa.org)> and clicking on the "Speakers" tab.*

Matt Mardis-LeCroy grew up in a small town in central Pennsylvania (there were 42 seniors in his graduating class) and earned a bachelor's degree in religion from Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, PA. Feeling called to study theology from an early age, he then went to Princeton Theological Seminary, where he earned a Master of Divinity degree. During his time at Princeton, he received awards for outstanding preaching and for New Testament exegesis, and he met and married his wife, a Presbyterian minister. His first pastoral post was heading the Community Church of Little Neck on the north shore of Long Island; in 2005, his wife was called to a job in Des Moines, and Matt followed her here, joining the staff at Plymouth. In 2013, he completed his Doctor of Ministry degree (in preaching) at Chicago Theological Seminary. He had served as Plymouth's senior minister-elect since a congregational vote in October 2013, and on November 23, 2014, he became Senior Minister of Plymouth Church.

As Senior Minister, Matt does minister stuff (preaching, teaching, worship leadership, pastoral care), carries administrative oversight for several of Plymouth's ministries, and collaborates with the Director of Operations and Finance to guide the overall life of the church. Outside of Plymouth, Matt has served as chair of the Committee on Ministry for the Central Association of the Iowa Conference of the United Church of Christ, and he teaches preaching through the Iowa Conference CENTER/LEARN program. He is a past chair of the Board of Directors of the Interfaith Alliance of Iowa, past president of the Great Neck Clergy Association, and a former member of the National Steering Committee for the UCC's 20/30 Clergy Network. Matt is married to Mary Beth Mardis-LeCroy, an ordained Presbyterian minister who (among other things) leads the Saturday Night Band at Plymouth. They have one daughter (Ellie), one son (Wil), and one cat (Hildegard). In his spare time, Matt enjoys reading, walking, and experimenting in the kitchen. Matt Mardis-LeCroy can be reached at Plymouth Church: (515)255-3149, ext. 17, and [mmardis-lecroy@plymouthchurch.com](mailto:mmardis-lecroy@plymouthchurch.com).

There were many small kids, scantily dressed (or totally naked) standing or running around in the dirt around the house. For the most part children are uneducated. The only toy we saw was a boy proudly showing us a wheel attached to a stick that he could push. Children work at a young age. We saw a boy, maybe six years old, walking along the road with a rope tied around the neck of a cow, and a girl about that age, trying to carry a bundle bigger than herself. She lost her balance, falling on the bundle and to the side before trying again to pick up the bundle. Many kids a bit older are working herding cattle, carrying bundles, or pulling donkeys with loads, as well as doing field work where cultivating the soil is possible.

Women work in many capacities: hoeing the fields or digging weeds with a stick, carrying large bundles on their back miles from a town, cooking outside, or doing laundry. Men are not often seen except hanging around in towns. We have heard that where the men go is somewhat of a mystery, but they do come home to make babies.

While in the Omo Valley, we were, fortunately, able to attend a traditional initiation of a young man in the Ari Tribe to prove his worthiness to marry. We waded across a river to reach a small clearing in a wooded area where a group of women were dancing and prancing in a small circle. They had large, heavy bells attached to their legs and were tooting small horns. It was an awful racket which increased when every minute or so they would turn inwards and jump up and down. Meanwhile some tribal men were having their faces painted.

Shocking could only describe the next activity. As a man arrived (understood to be the last person to be married) all the women picked up a stick with a flexible end (like a whip), ran to him pushing their sticks forward and hollering at him to take their whip. As he took one from one woman, the others stepped back. *Whack!* He hit her across the arms and back. She stepped back and others repeated the process. This went on for maybe 15 to 20 minutes. When he tired and started walking away, the women followed and kept pushing their sticks in his face so they could be struck. What we understood was that it was a badge of honor to have welts on your body, proving dedication to the man and therefore a "good woman."

Next came the enjoyable part of the initiation. After walking about a quarter mile down a path, we came to another clearing with a herd of Brahma bulls.

The initiation we were about to see is called "bull jumping." The young man to be married needed to be able to take a run and jump on the back of the first bull, then to the next and next over about six of them, and off the other side; repeating this three times. What was most surprising to us was that this took place in the middle of a large crowd of men and women, and the young man who performed this feat was totally naked. Our local guide could only tell us that it is a long-time tradition. It was fun to see!

As we continued east across southern Ethiopia, the land became more productive, with more fields of corn, wheat, or other grains. Still the work was done by hand. Further east we noticed a man with two cattle turning over the soil with a plow like shovel. It occurred to Allen that these primitive farmers were as advanced as his Dutch ancestors in the mid-1800s when they homesteaded in Iowa. Housing changed from round huts to more rectangular structures covered with exteriors of mud mixed with grass and corrugated metal roofs; many were even painted. Along the roads, there were more donkeys carrying loads rather than humans. Also, as we traveled east, we began to see a few motorcycles. There was not a car to be seen until we arrived in bigger cities.

We drove through towns of various sizes. In smaller towns, the stores were mostly stands or booths. The walkways between the stores and road were dirt, or mud if wet. Although we drove on paved roads (one of the few through the area) they were poorly maintained. We continually slowed for huge pot holes that still caused us to be thrown around in the truck.

Our Ethiopian tour ended in Addis Ababa, the Capital, with five million people. The traffic and people, especially at the market, made it feel totally chaotic. We were surprised at the lines of people -- literally blocks long -- waiting for a bus throughout the day and night. We did visit the National Museum where we were able to view the bones of Lucy, the earliest identified human being.

We left with a great deal to process about our experiences in these vastly different cultures. That included being part of a racial minority in a population almost totally African. In addition, and despite so much poverty everywhere, people we encountered did not seem unhappy, but appeared to be really enjoying life.

Our three weeks in Kenya and Ethiopia proved to be interesting and challenging, and provided the cultural experiences we sought.

*"Don't tell me what your values are -  
- show me your budget, and I'll know  
what your values are." Joe Biden*

*"Always be a little kinder  
than is necessary."  
-- James M. Barrie*



# #LGBTQHistory

by Jordan Duesenberg



# Instagram

I'm a history junkie, especially history that is untold or a more honest history than what was taught to me in school. I believe it is our personal responsibility to actively seek out our (LGBTQ) own history, largely because we were never taught it in the first place and also to ensure we don't lose our traditions, culture, and not let those that came before us ever be forgotten. Not to generalize (which I'm totally going to do) but my generation (a.k.a. millennials) isn't known best for picking up books and reading. To make matters more complicated, LGBTQ history is not really easy to come upon, unless you really know where to look. However, recently I've discovered that some of the best LGBTQ historical information I've come across has been from an unlikely and unconventional platform: Instagram. Here are five Instagram profiles that don't involve gorgeous, narcissistic gay men taking shirtless selfies, that I check on a daily basis to learn something about the past and entertain myself in the present.

@lgbt\_history

As the name implies, this is a pretty straightforward profile regarding all aspects of LGBTQ history. This profile posts everything from historical LGBTQ memorabilia, pictures of LGBTQ celebrities, and pictures from prominent events (Pride parades, protests, parties, etc.). I especially like how this profile touches on history pre-Stonewall, which is information a bit more difficult to come across.

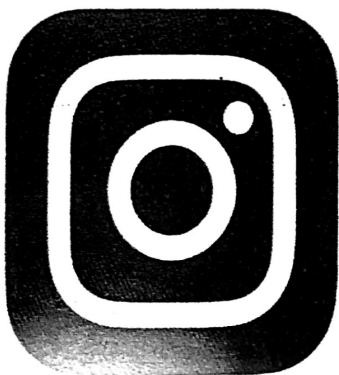


@bammer41

This profile is from a guy named Mike Balaban who miraculously captured what seemed to be his whole life on camera from the mid '70s to the present (however most of the images he posts are from the '70s to '90s. Most of the pictures he posts are of attractive men in exotic locations, but it's his lengthy posts that go along with the pictures that I especially enjoy. These stories talk about everything from his sexual conquests, popular gay bars and parties he attended, and general stories about living as a gay man at the time. I always enjoy firsthand accounts of how things were, and for me, this is one of the most honest and fascinating Instagram profiles that also show me that my experiences today aren't too different from his in the '70s & '80s.



Instagram



@tomusphere

This is Tom Eubank's profile, author of *The Ghosts of St. Vincent's* (which is also the first book we read for Capital City Pride's book club). The book is phenomenal and is mostly told through the author's eyes about NYC in the '80s and '90s, but especially about his experience with HIV/AIDS and his time spent at St. Vincent's Hospital's AIDS ward. The book also provides historical-fictional (which I'm hoping is an actual word) accounts of LGBTQ celebrities and their time at St. Vincent's. His Instagram profile features passages from the book and pictures to go along, which provides for a more engaging reading experience through-and-through.



Instagram

@theaidsmemorial

In my opinion, this is the single most important Instagram profile that exists. While not an LGBTQ profile per se, this profile features pictures and heartfelt stories about those who have passed as a result of HIV/AIDS since the start of the epidemic. Pictures and stories are sent by people all over the world, often by family members or close friends which is equally heartbreaking and beautiful to read.



@danceoftheclothes

My personal favorite Instagram profile documents music that was played at the infamous, hedonistic mega NYC gay nightclub, The Saint. The profile name, as I'm sure you guessed references the nightclub's patrons who were all wrapped up in Clone culture that was popular at the time. As a self-professed disco aficionado, I discover songs on a daily basis through this profile that I never knew existed that are typically even hard to find on streaming platforms today like songs by Amanda Lear, Bionic Boogie, Cerrone, and Linda Clifford to name a few.



Instagram

# Victory Fund Challenge

by Iowa State Senator Matt McCoy



Recently I participated in a conference with openly gay LGBTQ elected officials from around the nation and world. We gathered in Washington D.C. last week to discuss the current state of affairs for the LGBTQ community. The current situation is alarming. We are facing the most consequential times in a generation.

If we stand by and do nothing, many hard-fought victories will be eliminated with the stroke of a pen. If you do not see the threat to your individual and collective freedoms, consider the following:

- The Trump Administration has made zero efforts to recruit or promote LGBTQ officials within the administration. Quite the contrary, we have it on very good authority that openly gay applicants are to be rejected.
- Donald Trump announced by Twitter that the US military would no longer accept transgender service members and the ban would begin immediately.
- From the podium at the Whitehouse, spokesperson Sarah Huckabee Sanders announced that POTUS would be fine if businesses posted signs indicating no service for LGBTQ individuals. She noted that this is part of Trump's support for "religious" exemptions to civil rights protections.
- Currently, the House and Senate are in the process of negotiating the elimination of the Johnson Amendment, effectively ending Separation of Church and State.
- Hand-selected religious conservative leaning judges are being selected by Vice President Mike Pence. Many of these judges lack the credentials and a pedigree to serve as federal judges and, also, who have religious convictions that oppose marriage equality, equal opportunity for LGBTQ citizens in employment, housing, and public accommodations.

## LGBTQ

These are just a few of the challenges facing the LGBTQ community. Keep in mind that Donald Trump has only been President for 10 months. The damage that the Trump/Pence Administration can inflict on the LGBTQ community over the next three years is immeasurable.

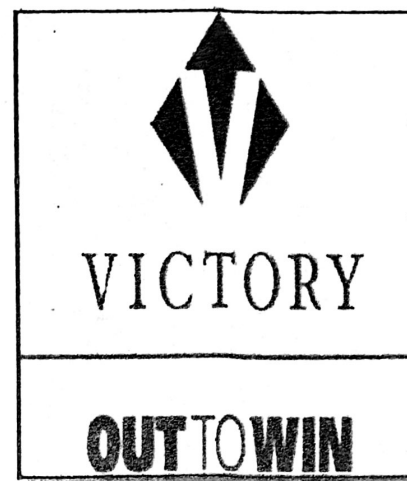
Make no mistake about it; we are in a battle for the heart and soul of our country. Our lives are on the chopping block every single day.

As a community, we must take action. We have the power to resist these policies, but it will require sacrifice. Are we willing to pay the high price that the Stonewall generation paid? Are we prepared to take to the streets and raise hell and risk arrest? Are we prepared to write the biggest checks we have ever written to candidates that support equality?

These are the questions that leaders at the Victory Fund spent several days debating. We left feeling unified, committed, and ready to resist. We face an uncertain future as a community. We must not look back at the end of the Obama administration as the high-water mark for LGBTQ equality.

I am confident that we will find our voices. We will rise and stand up just as Harvey Milk did as we battle for our collective future.

*"Gay people, we will not win our rights by staying quietly in our closets.... We are coming out to fight the lies, the myths, the distortions. We are coming out to tell the truth about gays, for I am tired of the conspiracy of silence, so I'm going to talk about it. And I want you to talk about it. You must come out." --Harvey Milk*



*"If things seem complicated and you don't understand what people are talking about, assume they're talking about money and you'll almost always be right."*

-- Carl Wilson

# 2018



# Wilkie Collins: A Gripping Short Biography of the Extraordinary Author of *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White* by Peter Ackroyd

A Book Review by Steve Person

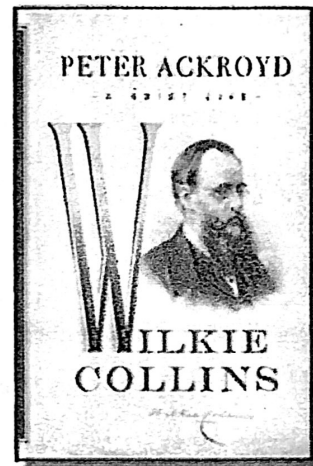


When the new outlet mall opened in late October in Altoona, a friend and I went to see what all the excitement was about. As it turns out, it is pretty much like any other outlet mall I have visited in other parts of the country. Fortunately, it has a bookstore.

One of the books I purchased was this short biography of Wilkie Collins. I had never heard of Wilkie Collins before, but when I saw that Peter Ackroyd wrote it, I knew I had to have it. I have written reviews of other books by Ackroyd in the newsletter, most notably his *Venice: Pure City* and *Shakespeare: The Biography*. To my mind, Ackroyd is the greatest living writer of the English language we have. For example, when describing Collins's research for his first novel, *Iolani*, Ackroyd writes, "...throughout his life he was inspired by documentary material, and in the process he breathed upon facts and kindled them into life." Wow! Those words alone would be reason enough to read this short biography.

Wilkie Collins is described as "short and oddly built, with a head too big for his body, extremely nearsighted, unable to stay still, dressed in colorful clothes...was nonetheless a charmer, befriended by the great, loved by children, irresistibly attractive to women—and avidly read by generations of readers."

Collins invented what Victorian audiences knew as the "detective novel." He was a contemporary of Charles Dickens, and the two were friends and collaborated on short pieces devoted to travel and plays that were written for both private and public audiences.



Collins was the antithesis of Victorian behavior and mores. He never married but kept two mistresses and fathered three children who were born out of wedlock. He traveled widely despite continued poor health and even, like Dickens, made his way to the United States on two occasions to enthusiastic audiences who came to listen to his reading of his written works. Dickens was by far the more successful and widely known of the pair, but attending readings by famous authors in the mid-nineteenth century was the equivalent of attending a rock concert in the modern world.

He wrote dramatic interpretations of his fiction, mainly in order to keep others from pirating his works for the stage. In those days, copyrights did not exist, so authors wrote for weekly or monthly periodicals. Once the final episode appeared, the novel would be published in book form, usually in the three volumes that lending libraries of the day preferred. A fascinating man, this Wilkie Collins, brought back to life by the inimitable Peter Ackroyd.