

About Dr. Michael Luick-Thrams:

My people came to America as of 1630 and to Iowa as of the 1830s. While they held diverse jobs along the way, they primarily worked the land as farmers or—later, in the Dakotas—as ranchers. Born in 1962, I grew up on Ashlawn Farm, the quarter-section my family stewarded for 105 years between Mason City and Clear Lake. I loved being on that farm, where three generations lived together: Our roots ran deep.

As a boy I devoured books about history and faraway lands, famous people and current issues. An honor student, I earned awards for church and writing competitions, and to National History Day—twice. I also won the top place at a speech contest on “Soil and Water: Our Key to the Future.” I angered many local farmers by criticizing the sole use of moldboard plows and advocating low- or even no-till cultivation. Old Timers said “What you’re peddling will never come to pass. Moldboards are here to stay.” Well...

Already as a kid, like my mother before me, I crossed “the color line” of Northcentral Iowa by having close friends who were African-American, Hispanic, Laotian or of backgrounds besides my own. At that time, such color-blindedness was not a given, as racism was still the norm for too many rural Iowans. Despite resistance from community members, I organized language classes and outings for refugees. When even relatives warned “Don’t get too close to ‘them’ as they aren’t Christians,” I walked away.

Coming from a long line of Methodists dating back at least to the 1850s, as I high schooler for a time I wanted to become a United Methodist pastor and go on assignment to refugee camps in Southeast Asia. I also considered carrying on our family’s tradition of farming, but in the 1980s that seemed impossible. I watched, pained, as Iowa farm families fell like flies, one by one, alone and seemingly with no recourse.

Life had different plans, anyway, and I accepted a Rotary International award to attend an all-boy school in Skipton, North Yorkshire for a year. I returned to study social history at Iowa State University, where I graduated after two years and eight months, with honors and a G.P.A. of 3.56. Among several others, I concluded an independent study, the thesis of which the Des Moines *Sunday Register* published. In it, I advocated the widespread use of wind mills across the state, soil conservation and cultural revival. Old Timers said that wind energy was “a pipe dream” and my calls for rural revival were “quaint but in vain.”

After completing a master’s degree in Cultural and Political History at Vermont’s Goddard College, in July 1991 I left a teaching post at a private school in New York to teach at then-existing Czechoslovakia with the Peace Corps. After completing my two-year stint as an instructor at Ostravska Univerzita, I moved to Berlin, where I earned a Ph.D. in Modern European History at Humboldt Universität.

It was during my doctoral studies that I began to document Iowa’s connections to Nazi Germany: the Jewish and other refugees at Scattergood Hostel near West Branch, U.S. prisoners of war held in the Third Reich, German POWs held in the Camp Algona system, Anne Frank’s pen pal near Burlington and dozens of other first-person accounts of encounters between the Midwest and Germany. Old Timers deemed by research into Iowa’s WWII-era history “an interesting hobby” but advised “get a real job.”

On the 11th of September 2001, by coincidence, I launched the TRACES Center for History and Culture project, which ultimately brought these regional histories to hundreds of thousands of people in all 99

Iowa counties and in 26 U.S. states in the form of mobile exhibits housed in two “BUS-eums” as well as lectures, conferences, cross-cultural exchanges, films series, concerts, publications and other forms. I featured Iowa stories on speaking tours in Australia and New Zealand, South Africa, Uruguay, England and Brazil. In 2011 I co-founded Spuren e.V., a German affiliate to carry out TRACES’ work in Europe.

The driving motivation throughout my adult life has been to connect people alive today to each other, to voices from the past and to dreams of a better shared future. It also leads me, now, to run for the US Senate from the great state of Iowa. While working to raise Iowa’s profile on the national stage, I seek to help Iowans find ways to recreate our homeland’s political landscape, to empower all citizens as we craft new ways of living that are more cooperative, less taxing of our natural resources and that redress unjust imbalances between those who create wealth and those who unfairly amass and misuse it.

As I believe that no public servant should hold any one elected office more than a dozen years, over the two terms that I’d like to serve in the U.S. Senate, I will advocate on behalf of both rural Iowans and the residents of our ascending urban areas. I will advance the interests of genuine family farms over those of agri-business giants, of students who want a decent future unencumbered by lifelong debt, of seniors wanting to enjoy their last decades with integrity and dependable healthcare. More than legislate, I seek to facilitate Iowans finding solutions to our own problems, offering a hand up rather than a hand out.

About his platform:

Iowans—and Americans generally—have shown since colonial times that we don’t want to be bore down under “excessive” legislation. Therefore, I will work to my fullest ability through both legislative as well as non-legal means to advocate the norm that no person serve in any one elected office more than twelve years. Furthermore, even if only per “gentlemen’s agreement,” I will champion the norm that campaigns do not visibly start more than ten months before a given election. In any event, all donors to campaigns must be named and organizations clearly identified regarding the source of their donations.

I will advocate that members of Congress take a 10% cut in pay, and propose that their pay be linked to productivity: The more bills considered till a vote, the more compensation awarded; the fewer, the less.

Rather than a lounge for old-boy friends with deep pockets, my Senate office will be a forum for Iowans of all economic brackets and social backgrounds. My 6-12 years in the Senate will be to offer Iowans and those who support us to connect with each other, find solutions to shared problems and move forward.

I will think outside the straightjackets that habitually bind ideologues of either party: I will work with anyone in Congress who proposes genuinely productive ideas and policies, regardless of her or his party.

It is time Iowa’s Senate offices facilitate change, not perpetuate outdated systems that don’t work.

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