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Editorial

A Hate Crime with a Religious Motive

By Becky O’Malley
Tue May 04 12:21:00 -0700 2010

The email from the Tikkun organization which the Planet received yesterday with the news that vandals had pasted up threatening messages at the home of founder Rabbi Michael Lerner said this: “The police say that this is not a ‘hate crime’ because the attackers were not attacking Rabbi Lerner for his religion, but for his politics.” With all due respect, the police have it exactly backwards. It’s his religion, not just his politics, that infuriates the crazies.

What the good people at Tikkun have been trying to do is to persuade religious people of all denominations to live up to their religious aspirations. This, of course, is asking for trouble.

Peter Maurin, the original ideologue of the radical Catholic Worker movement (which is still alive and well and living in Berkeley) spoke of “blowing the dynamite of the Church.” All religions, especially but not exclusively the prophetic ones which sprang from the deserts of the Middle East, have at their core revolutionary injunctions to pursue virtue by living in dramatically counter-intuitive ways.

Sell all our possessions and give the proceeds to the poor? Live peaceably with one another? You’ve got to be kidding!

Lerner and his colleagues at Tikkun are attempting to document and strengthen the best aspects of the religious impulse with what they call the Network of Spiritual Progressives. The magazine (both print and online) has contributions from all kinds of people from all sorts of backgrounds.

From its statement of core principles: “Tikkun Magazine was started as ‘the liberal and progressives alternative to the voices of Jewish conservatism and the neo-cons’ but it has become much more—a voice for a spiritual politics of meaning, and while it maintains its strong position as the most widely read and respected explicitly progressive Jewish magazine in the world, it also is a place where you can read some of the most creative Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist spiritual progressives as we together think out how to apply a spiritual progressive consciousness to the realities of the contemporary 21st century world.” The common thread is the idea that “people want their lives to have some higher meaning and purpose than simply accumulating money, power, sexual gratification and fame—they want their lives to be connected to something about which they can feel that it has transcendent value.”

But Tikkun doesn’t duck controversy in the name of some amorphous view of spirituality. A provocative sample, an article in the May-June issue: Are Israeli Policies Entrenching Anti-Semitism Worldwide? It’s a really excellent exploration of what the writer thinks has gone wrong in his beloved country, and the consequences.

In the last few months an explosion of shocking incidents and revelations has prompted people from all religious backgrounds to question the traditions in which they grew up. A Catholic friend, an academic by training, is working on a serious letter to the Pope explaining exactly what he must do to extricate the church from the sexual scandals of the last 20 years—good luck. Many Jews around the world and even in Berkeley have become critical of events in Israel/Palestine, saying that religion is being used as the excuse for actions which they believe are contrary to their traditional moral values. In this issue we have a commentary from a local resident raised in the Islamic tradition speculating about why the peaceful and intellectual community of his childhood has been displaced by militancy and violence.

The problem is that religion is a two-edged sword. For every Dorothy Day (and here a Father Coughlin, for every Richard Goldstone a Benjamin Netanyahu, for every Desmond Tutu a Jerry Falwell). Moral certainty too often translates into intolerance of differing concepts of morality or of those who practice a different religion.

Seeing this, many of us are inclined to dump the whole thing: baby, bathwater and all. Many if not most of us around here are at least post-religious if not anti-religious. And yet more often than not it’s the still-religious who keep speaking up when needed for the homeless and the undocumented in our midst. Father Bill O’Donnell still lives in the memory of everyone whose cause he championed. If it wasn’t for the U-Us (Unitarian-Universalists) and their endless forums many serious problems would never be noticed, let alone corrected.

And even the self-described non-religious citizens among us covertly adhere to the best principles of their birth religions. Many proprietors of small local groceries who were raised as Muslims sell the forbidden beer and wine out the front door, but they feed hungry poor folks out the back door consistent with their tradition. Proudly secular Jews still insist on trying to achieve justice in the world in the spirit of Tikkuolam, a Hebrew phrase that means “repairing the world” which is the inspiration for the magazine title.

So it’s a mistake to say that the misguided idiots who vandalized Rabbi Lerner’s home didn’t commit a hate crime, where a hate crime (admittedly a slippery concept) is defined as one with motivation prompted by religious prejudice among other categories. It’s exactly Michael Lerner’s dogged insistence that religion should mean what it says that infuriates a few wicked people who like to wrap themselves in the cloak of religion to disguise their bad behavior. This vicious intolerance, this kind of hate, should have no place in Berkeley.

News

Closing Arguments in UC Berkeley Stabbing Trial

By Bay City News
Tue May 04 12:44:00 -0700 2010

A defense attorney told jurors today that “it’s been a long and demanding ride” for a man charged with murder for the stabbing death of University of California at Berkeley senior Christopher Wootton near campus two years ago today.

In her closing argument in the trial of 22-year-old Andrew Hoeft-Edenfield, his attorney, Yolanda Huang, said she gets strength from him because of “what he’s gone through and endured” since being arrested for the death of Wootton in the parking lot of a sorority house in the 2400 block of Warring Street at about 2:45 a.m. May 3, 2008.

Pointing at Hoeft-Edenfield, Huang said he “maintains a faith that justice will be done” yet “sits there so powerless.”

Prosecutor Connie Campbell immediately objected to Huang’s comments, prompting Alameda County Superior Court Judge Jeffrey Horner to summon both attorneys in the lengthy and contentious trial to his chambers for a five-minute discussion away from jurors and the spectators who packed his courtroom.

When Huang resumed her closing argument, she said, “Mr. Hoeft-Edenfield is calm and composed and remains positive in the hopes of justice.”

Huang said Hoeft-Edenfield should be
found not guilty of murder charges for Wootton’s death because “there’s no evidence on when and how it happened” and “there’s no evidence on how the stabbing took place.”

But Campbell said, “The evidence is very clear that the defendant (Hoeft-Edenfield) killed Christopher Wootton in cold blood.”

Campbell said the stabbing was “a very cold-blooded killing and the evidence overwhelmingly supports a verdict of murder.”

Wootton, 21, who was from Bellflower in Southern California, was only weeks away from graduating with honors in nuclear engineering when he was killed. He planned to continue studying nuclear engineering in graduate school at UC Berkeley, according to a statement issued by Chancellor Robert Birgeneau after the stabbing.

Campbell said Wootton was “a thoughtful, intelligent man with great leadership skills and discipline and had a bright future.”

Campbell alleged that Hoeft-Edenfield presented himself as “a thug” and had anger management problems that prevented him from walking away from a drunken shouting match that developed when Hoeft-Edenfield and a group of his friends encountered Wootton and a group of his friends on a street near campus.

Huang told jurors in her opening statement on March 16 that Hoeft-Edenfield, who worked at Jamba Juice in Berkeley and attended Berkeley City College, “doesn’t have a malicious bone in his body” and acted in self-defense after he was “outrum-bered, surrounded, kicked and stomped” by Wootton and a large group of Wootton’s friends. But Campbell said today that testimony by Hoeft-Edenfield’s former teachers and others provided “overwhelm-ing evidence that he’s a violent, explosive person with anger management problems his whole life.”

Campbell said Hoeft-Edenfield’s anger management issues were evident in his “unwillingness to walk away from a verbal argument and in his decision to reach into his pocket and pull out a knife” in the confrontation in which Wootton was fatally stabbed.

“You can’t bring a deadly weapon to a fistfight and claim it was self-defense,” Campbell said.

She said Hoeft-Edenfield “expressed his intent to kill” by threatening Wootton and his friends by asking them, “Who wants to be stabbed?” and “Who wants to fucking die?”

Campbell said Hoeft-Edenfield’s actions after the stabbing also refute Huang’s contention that he acted in self-defense.

The prosecutor said Hoeft-Edenfield threw his knife into some bushes, although it was recovered the next day, tried to wash his clothes immediately afterward and didn’t call police to report that he had acted because he feared for his life.

Jurors will begin deliberating Hoeft-Edenfield’s fate late Tuesday after Huang and Campbell finish their closing arguments.

Rabbi’s Berkeley Hills Home Vandalized

From a Tikkun Magazine Press Release
Tue May 04 12:56:00 -0700 2010

[Editor’s Note: This information was received as a press release at 3 on Monday afternoon. Berkeley Police Department Public Information Officer Jamie Perkins confirmed that the crime at Rabbi Lerner’s home in the 900 block of Cragmont was reported at 11:40 on Monday, and she said Monday at about 6 p.m. that police had no suspects as yet.]<br />

Berkeley police today confirmed that the attack on Rabbi Lerner’s home late Sunday May 2nd or early morning Monday May 3rd was in fact a crime and was being investigated.

The attackers used a powerful form of glue to attach posters to his door and around the property of his home attacking Lerner personally, and attacking liberals and progressives as being supporters of terrorism and “Islam-fascism.” They posted a printed bumper sticker saying “fight terror--support Israel” next to a caricature of Judge Goldstone whose UN report on Israel’s human rights violations in its attack on Gaza last year has been denounced as anti-Semitic and pro-terror by right wingers in Israel and the U.S.. The caricature has Goldstone talking about his being kept from his grandson’s bar mitzvah, and the caricature of Rabbi Lerner responds by saying “any enemy of Israel is a friend of mine.” This attack and vandalism follows on a week filled with Lerner and Tikkun staff receiving hate mail, prompting apparently by Tikkun’s announcement that in case the South African Zionists had succeeded in preventing Judge Goldstone from attending his grandson’s bar mitzvah, as they threatened several weeks ago, that Rabbi Lerner would gladly hold the bar mitzvah in the SF Bay Area instead, and following Tikkun’s announcement that in light of Goldstone’s courageous willingness to stand up for human rights in Israel (his report called on the Israeli government to do its own independent, public and credibly objective investigation, punish those responsible for the crimes or show that they didn’t happen, and thereby show that these actions were not government policy but the mistakes or evil choices by people in the IDF who were acting as rogue elements and not as a manifestation of the people of Israel) that Tikkun will award our prestigious Tikkun Award to Judge Goldstone in 2011 at the event celebrating our 25th anniversary! This story, which was prominent in Ha’aretz and many other Jewish magazines and websites, has intensified anger against Lerner and Tikkun among those who seek to perpetuate the Occupation, and great support among those who realize that the Occupation is really hurtful both to Israel and to the Jewish people world-wide.

In the 24 years of Tikkun’s operation, we have received many death threats and vicious hate mail, including phone calls to our office announcing that “Rabbi Lerner is dead” and others saying “We will kill all of you.” This particular attack has two worrisome elements not previously there: 1. They attack Rabbi Lerner’s home. As law enforcement people told us, this is a way of conveying the message to Lerner: “We know where you live, we know your house is vulnerable, so don’t ignore our threats.” 2. By linking Lerner to alleged terrorism, they provide for themselves and other extremists a “right-wing justification” to use violence against Lerner, even though Lerner has been a prominent advocate of non-violence. He regularly critiques Palestinian acts of violence when they occur, including the shelling of Israeli towns by Hamas, just as he criticizes the violence of the Israeli occupation, and as he criticizes the US war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the occupation of Chechnya by Russia, the occupation of Tibet by China, the human rights violations against their own people by the rulers of Iran, the acts of violence of those resisting the US occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, the violence against women and homosexuals in many Arab and African countries (and in the US and Israel as well), the genocide in Darfur, the violence against Jews in some parts of Europe, and the list goes on.

Needless to say, this latest attack, on Lerner’s home, has caused great concern to his family.

In a previous email about the attack on Rabbi Lerner’s house, the dates were incor-
The police say that this is not a “hate crime” because the attackers were not attacking Rabbi Lerner for his religion, but for his politics. That is scant comfort for those of us who continue to believe that America and Israel are best served by the voices willing to publicly share critique, though incidents like this are of course meant to scare people into silence. Tikkun will not be silenced.

What can you do? Let people know that this kind of thing is happening in the Jewish world to people who critique Israeli policies.

--Tikkun Magazine
To reach Rabbi Lerner directly: RabbiLerner@Tikkun.org or call the Tikkun office at 510 644 1200.

Family Mourns Son Murdered a Year Ago Today--Crime is Still Unsolved

Tue May 04 18:54:00 -0700 2010

A year ago today, on the night of May 4, 2009 at about 11:30, neighbors reported hearing gunfire in the 1300 block of 67th Street. Berkeley police officers found Maurice Robertson, 18, of Berkeley, dead from gunshot wounds in the backyard of a home there.

This was Berkeley’s only unsolved murder in 2009.

According to a recent press release from the Berkeley Police Department, his family is still devastated by their loss. Police Information Officer Jamie Perkins quotes his mother, Charlene Adams, saying, “It would really hurt my heart if I have to live the rest of my life without knowing what happened to my son”.

Tonight, Tuesday, May 4, from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., the family will be holding a vigil in the rear yard of 1340 67th Street in memory of Maurice Robertson.

BPD detectives want to speak with someone they consider “a person of interest” seen by witnesses near the crime scene before the shooting.

Witnesses described him as a Black male, 16-19 years old, 5’8” to 5’10” in height, wearing an orange Northface-style windbreaker jacket.

The City of Berkeley is offering a $15,000 reward and the Bay Area Crime Stoppers have offered an additional $2,000 reward, for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the suspect(s) responsible for Robertson’s murder.

BPD Homicide Detectives urge anyone who has information regarding this case to come forward. Anyone with information can contact the BPD Homicide Detail at (510) 981-5741 or the BPD non-emergency line at (510) 981-5900. Callers can remain anonymous by calling the Bay Area Crime Stoppers Tip Line at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

Arizona’s Immigration Law Spurs Copycat Legislation

By Marcelo Ballvé, New America Media
Mon May 03 19:19:00 -0700 2010

Arizona’s new get-tough immigration law has emboldened other state capitol’s to follow suit.

Legislators in at least 10 states— Utah, Oklahoma, Colorado, Ohio, Missouri, Georgia, South Carolina, Mississippi, Texas, and Maryland— have called for laws that would mirror Arizona’s Senate Bill 1070, according to the Progressive States Network and reporting by New America Media.

First out of the gate to actually introduce a bill was South Carolina.

Along with 20 co-sponsors, Rep. Eric Bedingfield, a Republican, introduced a bill April 29 that, like Arizona’s, requires law enforcement officials to check individuals’ immigration status.

Some of the language in the South Carolina bill, which was posted on the legislature’s website, is virtually identical to the most controversial portion of the Arizona measure signed into law by Gov. Jan Brewer on April 23.

The South Carolina bill reads: “When reasonable suspicion exists that the person is an alien who is unlawfully present in the United States, a reasonable attempt must be made, when practicable, to determine the immigration status of the person.”

Civil rights advocates, like the Rev. Al Sharpton, blasted the same phrasing in the Arizona law as opening the door to ethnic profiling of Latinos and anyone else appearing foreign-born. Kevin R. Johnson, dean of the University of California, Davis School of Law, agrees the language is “very open-ended” and that some of the civil rights concerns over the Arizona law are warranted. But, he argues, successful legal challenges will likely focus on the far more clear-cut case that such laws usurp the federal government’s constitutionally granted supremacy over immigration.

Even so, state capitals, county seats and city halls insist on trying to legislate immigration controls.

In 2007, for example, Oklahoma passed a hard-line immigration law, which, while not as tough as Arizona’s, imposed a set of controls on employers and made it a felony to harbor, shelter or transport undocumented immigrants.

This year, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit struck down a section of the Oklahoma law pertaining to penalties on employers. The court said the Oklahoma measure was pre-empted in that area by federal law.

But that didn’t frighten Oklahoma lawmakers away from the immigration issue. They are now cobbled together proposals that would outdo even Arizona. Republican Rep. Randy Terrill has said a bill he’s authoring may go one step further and provide for the seizure and forfeiture of property of those caught in immigration violations.

Latino communities in Oklahoma, who lived through panic and an exodus in the wake of the 2007 law, are bracing for a new crackdown, says Patricia Fennel, executive director of the Tulsa-based Latino Community Development Agency.

“When the legislature we have now, if that [new] legislation was introduced tomorrow, I think it would pass easily,” says Fennel.

The controversial Arizona law may be emboldening immigration hardliners.

But as Oklahoma’s own experience shows, states’ efforts to curb illegal immigration— and criminalize it— pre-date Arizona’s new bill.

But Arizona’s action seems to have spread the idea that state-level immigration laws can get tougher. Mississippi passed a bill in 2008 that made it a felony for an undocumented immigrant to solicit or accept work in the state. Now, Mississippi legislators are calling for the state to adopt Arizona’s tougher approach, according to Bill Chandler, executive director of the Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance. The handful of state legislators known for their frequent “ranting and raving” about illegal immigration “ramped it up since Arizona,” adds
The crisis in Arizona today only shows what happens when the federal government fails to do its job,” says Ali Noorani, executive director of the National Immigration Forum.

Berkeley News Roundup

By Riya Bhattacharjee
Tue May 04 12:53:00 -0700 2010

In the news since the last issue: Zoning changes for Panoramic Hill and Telegraph, fines for daycare centers proposed, new marijuana regulations, 155-unit apartment complex for South Shattuck, credit card fraud, a music club in financial trouble, students begin hunger strike to protest immigration law.

Tuesday City Council meeting to include special session on 2011 budget

The Berkeley City Council meeting Tuesday will begin with a special 5:30 p.m. workshop on the proposed fiscal year 2011 city budget given by City Manager Phil Kamlarz and Budget Manager Tracey Vesley. It can be viewed online. The regular 7 p.m. City council meeting agenda includes Panoramic Hill zoning amendments as well as proposed adjustments to the Telegraph Avenue zoning laws.

Berkeley Mayor Tom Bates and Councilmembers Laurie Capitelli, Kris Worton and Gordon Wozniak will request the City Manager to analyze and work with relevant commissions on proposed modifications in Telegraph’s current commercial zoning which would permit businesses to extend their business hours to 3 a.m., Sunday through Saturday by simply getting a zoning certificate.

Other adjustments include implementing a six month trial project to change the yellow parking after 6 p.m. zoning certificate. It can be viewed online. The regular 7 p.m. City council meeting agenda includes Panoramic Hill zoning amendments as well as proposed adjustments to the Telegraph Avenue zoning laws.

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Berkeley May Fine Large Home Family Daycares

The Berkeley City Council may also ask City Manager Phil Kamlarz Tuesday to review cases involving large, in-home family day care businesses whose owners have not obtained a Berkeley business license, not paid Berkeley business fees or don’t have the appropriate use permit.

After the City Manager’s office finished the review, it would develop a 90-day amnesty program during which large family daycare providers who have not yet obtained business licenses would be given a chance to come forward and register their businesses without being subject to penalties.

The city would also develop a payment plan for this group of daycare businesses, under which they would have to pay business fees due since 2007.

According to a report from city staff, some providers may have to pay fees of up to $7000 to the city. A number of daycare owners have contacted the city saying that these exorbitant payments might force them out of business altogether.

The staff report says that although the City Auditor has requested information from four large in-home family daycares, she has not yet received a response.

Medical Marijuana Regulation Changes

The Berkeley City Council will also vote on whether to allow all three of the city’s medical marijuana dispensaries to expand beyond retail space to grow cannabis and bake marijuana-laced cookies and brownies in residential and commercial properties.

Both city staff and the Medical Cannabis Commission are putting forward their own set of recommendations which vary regarding the size and scope of the proposed operations.

The council will also vote on whether to approve language for a ballot measure for Nov. 2010 to amend the Business License Tax Ordinance to tax certain medical cannabis uses.

City Attorney Zach Cowan has suggested that one way to balance the city’s current deficit is to increase the business tax on medical cannabis dispensaries from 1.12 percent to 1.8 percent, which is expected to bring in $330,000 in 2011.

In comparison, the city imposes a 15 percent tax on firearm and ammunition dealers, a 15 percent tax on private rubbish haulers and a 10 percent tax on private sporting events.

In the scenario that a medical cannabis dispensary attains non-profit status and becomes exempt from business tax, Cowan said it would be taxed on the basis of its square feet, just as large non-profits already are.
Berkeley Approves $60 M Parker Place Development

Developers Ali Kashani and Mark Rhoades of City Centric Investments have received the entitlements to their Parker Place project, the SF Business Times reported, today.

Developers of the mixed-use apartment project with 155 units, a 188-spot parking garage and 1900 square feet of retail space at 2600 Shattuck Ave. promise to revitalize an otherwise underutilized part of the neighborhood, but like a lot of other building projects, this one has met with some criticism.

Twenty percent of the rental units will be affordable housing which will help the developers get access to low income housing tax credits.

Berkeley Police Warn of Credit Card Fraud

The Berkeley Police Department is asking the community to watch out for credit card thefts which they say have escalated over the last few months.

Although the police did not point toward specific cases, they said the problem was probably part of a larger operation and urged caution.

Berkeley music venue in trouble

The SF Chronicle reports that the all volunteer underground music venue 924 Gilman St. is in trouble because of a high rent increase starting July 1 which may push it out of its home.

The staff at 924 Gilman is reaching out to the community to raise the extra $31,000 required annually to cover the rent expenses, scheduling concerts, donation drives and there are plans to apply for non-profit status to qualify for special funds.

UC Berkeley students begin hunger strike to protest Arizona Illegal Immigration Law

A group of UC Berkeley students began a hunger strike on campus Monday demanding that Chancellor Robert Birgeneau oppose Arizona’s illegal immigration law, call off disciplinary action against the protesters occupying Wheeler Hall to protest budget cuts, bring back laid off janitors and turn the Berkeley campus into a sanctuary for undocumented immigrants.

Latinos student groups called the hunger strike at noon today and have planted themselves outside California Hall, which houses the offices of the university officials.

Various student groups on campus have previously asked for the last three items on the list of demands on different occasions, but have so far met with no success.

Berkeley City Council Rejects “Full Build” BRT for EIR, Endorses “Reduced Impact”

By Joyce Roy (Partisan Position)  
Tue May 04 13:08:00 -0700 2010

Last Thursday night the Berkeley City Council unanimously approved the “Reduced Impact Alternative” BRT that is similar to “Rapid Bus Plus” as the “Locally Preferred Alternative.” It rejected the “Build Alternative” which would have removed traffic lanes and placed boarding stations in the middle of the street even though AC Transit sent a letter saying, more or less, that it was obliged to choose that alternative. This meeting with Bus Rapid Transit the only agenda item ended after 11:00 pm. Sixty-six members of the public were against the “Build Alternative,” twenty-three in favor and five asked all alternatives to be studied. Here are the alternatives.

Since the draft EIR/EIS only studied the No-Build and the Full-Build, there was no discussion between the AC Transit representative, Cory LaVigne, and the city’s attorney about whether a different alternative could now be studied. LaVigne said since it was not in the draft, it could not be studied in the final. It would have to be a special study, perhaps a supplemental EIR. So after the deed is done, AC Transit comes to the cities to ask them for their preferred alternative. But as the attorney assured the city council, the city itself, not AC Transit, determines changes to their streets.

The council’s decision does not affect AC Transit’s ability to receive federal Small-Start funds because dedicated lanes are not one of the required criteria for BRT. But AC Transit’s fiscal condition may make them ineligible. See BRT Small Starts Fact Sheet.

Councillmembers discussed the “environmental justice” of removing local service because it would impact the elderly and disabled. But retaining local service did not seem to be included in the “Reduced Impact Alternative.” It was part of the “Rapid Bus Plus” alternative. Also included in that alternative was splitting the line in downtown Oakland to avoid the bunching that occurs on very long lines like the #51.

Some council members wanted to extend the BRT down University Ave. to Amtrak, which would mean it would connect to the San Pablo Rapid Bus, but AC Transit claimed it could not be studied now.

Mayor Bates asked how Berkeley would connect to Oakland if they have dedicated lanes. The short answer was “awkwardly.” But Temescal residents are not likely to accept dedicated lanes: See this week’s article in the East Bay Express.

Joyce Roy is a semi-retired architect and long-time Oakland transit activist. Partisan Position writers are not guaranteed to be impartial, although they are knowledgeable and hope to provide accurate factual information.

Berkeley High Community Members Weigh in on Principal Selection Process

By Raymond Barglow  www.berkeleytutors.net  
Tue May 04 19:15:00 -0700 2010

About 25 parents and other community members met at the Berkeley High School Library last Tuesday evening to present to the district board their ideas about what they are looking for in a high school principal.

Superintendent Bill Huyett and Assistant Superintendent Lisa van Thillo outlined for those in attendance the selection process for choosing a principal. “High schools,” said Huyett, “are like little cities”; a principal must manage many systems and handle quite complex personnel and resource allocation issues.

Huyett referred to a Rand study indicating that it is the principal of a school, along with highly qualified teachers and a coherent curriculum, who makes a school work. Hence choosing an effective principal for Berkeley High is of crucial importance. Huyett said he appreciates community interest and input: “Good schools have engaged parents … parents push the school.”

That input was amply forthcoming at the meeting. Here are some of the opinions voiced:

There is at Berkeley High “competition for scarce resources. A strong principal would allocate resources equitably.”

“Berkeley High is divided into small schools. There is strength in that, but we are really divided and quite parochial.” A principal needs to think about what is “good for the whole school.” We need “a genuine appreciation of diversity that is more than political.”
A number of parents voiced their concern about the achievement gap at BHS between high-performing and underperforming students. Reducing this gap must be a priority for an incoming principal: “I don’t know why we have such a high gap. A principal must deal with diverse students in a diverse school district.”

Several speakers said a new principal should pay more attention to safety issues at the school, and alluded to dangers their children have faced. One person said “I have found that school committees are cherry-picked. If you don’t agree, you are kicked out.”

Another parent submitted that integrity and curiosity are key values that the school should foster.

Huyett said that the deadline for new applications for the principal position has passed, and that there have been 45 applications. In May, the application process, involving perhaps a site visit to schools where applicants currently work, will proceed. Two panels will interview the applicants: a “technical” panel consisting of school staff, and a community panel consisting of representatives of community groups. Neil Smith will lead the technical panel, and Huyett will coordinate the community panel.

In response to audience questions about how panelists will be chosen, Huyett said that “the Superintendent will look to see that we have diversity on our panels.” Lisa van Thillo will also be involved in this selection process. Some teachers have expressed a concern about teacher panelists being chosen in a fair way from the six small learning communities.

Interviews of applicants by the panels will get underway this week.

The thoughtful tenor of the meeting on Tuesday evening, in which a wide variety of views were voiced and considered, indicated a commitment to openness and dialogue. As Peggy Scott, parent representative to the school governing council, remarked: “Diversity is really about respecting everybody and appreciating their differences.”

**Odd Bodkins -- The Miracle**

*By Dan O’Neill*

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**Reader Opinion**

**Signs of Our Time**

*By Steve Martinot*

Mon May 03 21:36:00 -0700 2010

On Mayday, I participated in the march and rally in SF for immigrant rights. I do this because I think that people should come before profits, human rights before property rights, and if those principles held true, we wouldn’t need borders in the first place.

The march of about 10,000 people ended at Civic Center. Across the street, in front of City Hall, there was a small counter-demonstration, a total of 31 persons, strung out along about 200 feet of sidewalk, holding signs. Some were the usual advertisements, like “Minutemen securing America’s borders,” which constitute the mask behind which Minutemen harass Latinos in Chicago, Los Angeles, or North Carolina, far from the Mexican border. And there were the outright lies, such as “Illegals cost us trillions,” where just the opposite is the case. Immigrants come to work, produce value,
get minimum pay or less, pay taxes, and pay into social security without ever having a prayer of eventually benefiting from any of it. They send home what they can, and the rest benefits us, including those holding their perfidious signs.

But three signs in particular caught my eye.

One said “We need more ice at this fiesta.” Ice, of course, is a reference to ICE, Immigration Control and Enforcement. Since this was directed at our demonstration, it was a suggestion that the demonstration itself (including myself) needed to be deported. You remember the old saw (from Cold War years), “if you don’t like it here, go back where you came from.” Beyond admitting the well-known fact that all non-indigenous people in the US are descended from immigrants, it meant that our tenure or residency here is contingent on agreeing with certain people arrogant enough to set standards for us. It is not the law that these counter-demons want to enforce, but the purity and homogeneity of their kind of society and culture. We know, from European experience, what that ethos looks like when it gets militarized.

Another sign said, “Get in line to become an American (legally).” America is two continents full of people. The immigrants who come from countries south of us are already Americans. Many of them are the sons and daughters of people who have been on these two continents for millenia, much longer than those individuals with their white faces claiming to be the “Americans.” For people in the US to consider themselves “the” Americans is to reduce all the other Americans to lesser status through their exclusion from being Americans; in other words, to dispossess them of their dignity and humanity as Americans. It is therefore a colonialist attitude, using a structure of racism as its technology. But there is no other social category, in a hierarchical relation to other social categories. Here’s an example. A white person can, is a way of acting white. For a white person to think that way, including black people, is a way of acting white. It’s a politically and culturally determined social category, in a hierarchical relation to other social categories. Here’s an example. A white person might say, “I don’t see myself as white, I’m just human. I think all people should think that way, including black people.” But black people in the US have had to live their entire lives dealing with and resisting white supremacy, which isn’t true for white people. For a white person to think that black people should just give that up, and abandon who they have had to become to deal with and resist all that, because this white person can, is a way of acting white. In pretending to give up telling others who they are, it continues to tell them who they should be, rather than simply let them decide how to live this difficult society, and respect that decision.

In the meantime, we are all racialized (white, black, Latino, Native American, Asian, Middle Eastern) by white supremacy and the social machinery (the identities, institutions, and attitudes) by which it produces that racialization and imposes it. Where does racism fit into this? Racism is the technology of that white machine.

**The Dementia of Petroleum Addiction?**

*By Craig Collins, Ph.D.
Mon May 03 21:42:00 -0700 2010*

Petroleum executives assure us that their giant tankers and offshore oil rigs pose no danger to the environment; coal company CEOs insist that their mines are safe and that blasting away mountaintops is ecologically benign; natural gas companies insist that “fracking” deep underground geological formations will not contaminate fresh water aquifers; and nuclear power promoters tell us not to worry about core meltdowns or the disposal of millions of tons of highly radioactive waste. Do we have S-T-U-P-I-D written on our foreheads? Or do we just choose to swallow these lies because, like addicts everywhere, we need these pushers to provide us with our daily energy fix?

These energy “suppliers” have a sordid history of crimes against nature and humanity and their assurances of safety have proven tragically wrong time after time. Clearly their drive for profit knows no ethical or legal boundaries. So why do we continue buy their lies, and reward them with lavish subsidies and tax breaks, instead of kicking our habit and sending these petroleum pushers to prison?

Just last year BP—who now tells us BP stands for “Beyond Petroleum,” not British Petroleum—told the government that an oil spill like the one wreaking havoc in the Gulf was highly unlikely so they didn’t need to install the remote controlled valves that could prevent an uncontrolled blowout. Beyond Petroleum?...more like Beyond Belief.

According to the watchdog group, Public Citizen, BP has the worst criminal rap sheet of any oil company—and that’s no mean feat. In the last few years, BP has paid $485 million in fines and settlements to the US government for environmental crimes, willful neglect of worker safety, and penalties for manipulating energy markets. As BP’s massive oil slick smothers the Gulf’s fragile wetland ecosystems and lays waste to the fishing and tourist industries, assurances of safety are no more credible than the sworn testimony of a career criminal.
The same goes for the Massey Coal Company—the biggest coal mining business in central Appalachia. Massey insisted its Montcoal operation was safe right up to the day when their mine—that was repeatedly cited for improperly venting methane gas—exploded killing 29 people in the country’s deadliest underground disaster in a quarter-century.

Last year, the number of citations issued against the mine more than doubled and the penalties proposed against the mine more than tripled. Massey was fined $897,325 over the last year, more than $382,000 for repeated serious violations involving its ventilation system. Andrew Tyler, a conveyer belt electrician, told the New York Times that live wires were often left exposed and that coal dust and methane accumulation were routinely ignored. Yet, after the explosion, Massey CEO Don Blankenship told Metronews radio that, despite the company’s many violations, the Mine Safety and Health Administration would never have allowed the mine to operate if it had been unsafe.

It’s time to clear our heads of gasoline fumes and our economic arteries of high-octane euphoria. Energy addiction is distorting our judgment and allowing these energy pushers to get away with murder and ecocide. Unless we come to our senses and ecocide. Unless we come to our senses and ecocide. Unless we come to our senses and ecocide. Unless we come to our senses and ecocide. Unless we come to our senses and ecocide. Unless we come to our senses and ecocide.


First Person: The Metamorphosis and Evisceration of Islamic Progressivism

By Rizwan Rahmani
Mon May 03 22:39:00 -0700 2010

While I was brought up in a very traditional Muslim environment during my early childhood years, my views on religion have changed drastically. Now I am more of an agnostic who is verging on atheism. I don’t believe there are going to be multitude of Hoors (indescribably gorgeous women of paradise) in the offing for me after I die and go to heaven eventually – I am sure I have to endure some fire and brimstone! Having been brought up traditionally, I do have a unique perspective of looking from inside out without really being an insider.

During my teen years in India, I saw a much more progressive Muslim world around me than what I see now. My dad was a good example of all that progressivism: he got a good education and became a doctor (physician). He worked in India for a bit, and got a chance to work in Oman in 1968, and went there leaving his family behind in hopes of freeing us from somewhat of a grim future. But even then, as evident in my father’s case, the Muslims in India stood a good chance of doing well if they worked hard despite being a minority group: my uncle did his masters before settling down in the family business. No one on my uncle’s side of the family has done better education-wise since then, and that was forty years ago!

After some tattered schooling and some failed academic endeavors, my father sent us to a boarding school in Aligarh (a university town) for education along with our sister who was attending a girl’s college which was also there: he was an alumnus of the University so he saw it fit to give us the same opportunity. Aligarh Muslim University was very progressive, liberal, and cosmopolitan despite being steeped in traditions (no one was allowed to wear the traditional cotton trouser and top other than mid Friday in public unless it was accompanied by a long formal coat). There was a particular code of behavior when it came to interacting with seniors, and language was to be used in a refined manner. I often got chided for improper diction and pronunciation.

There were quite a few international students at the campus. Although I was attending a university affiliated high school, I had access to the university and its facilities, and I knew more than a few seniors with whom I often socialized. I used to go the university gymnasium and the recreation rooms of the dormitories, where I played bridge, billiards, table tennis, and roller skated. I use to talk ad nauseum about movies, music, science, poetry, and general knowledge; While people were somewhat religious, it was never discussed or proselytized. I couldn’t attend the University language clubs but there was a German, a Russian, and a French club at the University. There was even an equestrian club. I also went to see plays and old films at the Kennedy center: an art and culture hub of the campus, and so named because it was built by a grant from the United States. The area in and around the campus was teeming with tea houses, cafés, and restaurants.

There were annual functions, shows, dinners, performances. The campus was a far cry from my narrow-minded and religious early childhood that I had witnessed when I lived at my grandparents’ house. When I went back to visit this very same campus after fourteen years, I hardly recognized it. Gone was the impeccable use of the language, along with proper attire or behavior. The buildings and gardens too looked a bit dilapidated. But the most notable change was the whole atmosphere: It now emanated religious austerity and regression, and attitudes seemed rather pedestrian.

The news of my sister attending college elicited vociferous ridicule and gossip from our relatives and friends of the family. They thought my father was committing a faux pas, and his aspirations for his daughter were out of step with the cultural mores of the time. But they thought it was heretical effrontery when she decided to study further: The general consensus was that a post graduate study was an abomination for a Muslim girl and for her to get married immediately the only honorable option.

While at college, my sister was very chic for her time, and wore the latest fashions and prints. She had quite a few western outfits (bell bottoms and all) – something she can’t even imagine wearing today! She didn’t wear hijab (head covering), and very few other Muslim women wore it back then. But more educated women definitely eschewed hijab, opting to cover their heads during religious ceremonies and somber occasions only. All her daughters wear hijab now, and my sister won’t afford them the same chance at higher education that she herself had three decades ago: a decision I don’t think is entirely hers but there is certainly complicity.

Despite all the protests my father stayed steadfast, and in my view, did right by defying his detractors. He certainly gave us (the eldest 4 of us) a very forward looking philosophy in life. When I left home for US to study, he never flinched while my mother’s wailing never ceased. My father was very outgoing, and socialized with all sorts of people. He attended cocktail parties while he was working in Oman, which was run mostly by British expats. He did socialize with the locals as well, sat in tents in the desert heat sipping Turkish coffee, and learning the etiquette of the Bedouins. Some of the guests at our house in Oman were British who loved my mother’s cooking. When I was in Oman, we attended Colonel Bosted’s yearly Christmas party: one of my father’s good friend and possibly a British agent. My mother grew up in a small town...
in India: she was modestly educated but conservative. But she learned to throw grand soirees, and make some fancy western desserts to entertain these guests. My father also organized lavish picnics and potlucks where everyone was invited and the sexes mingled. My mother was more religious than my father but she never raised an eyebrow at my father, and took part in these events enthusiastically. My father always encouraged us to interact socially, and he never lectured us or chastised us about religion.

So what has changed in the last thirty years? Why are my younger siblings, who were raised in a more urbane environment, and had better education, are less progressive than my father? This phenomenon is not only limited to India: it afflicts the Muslim community everywhere. These are the same people who produced hoards of scholars, poets, philosophers, and scientists during multiple golden periods but are now obsessively preoccupied with a fourteen hundred year old Sharia (Quranic Laws) and Sunna (tales of the Prophet’s life and practices), overanalyzing anachronistic minutiae while the rest of world hurls towards modernism. Why is this group of people -- who ruled the entire Middle East and parts of the Near East, North Africa, and most of the Iberian Peninsula, who can boast among their luminaries people like Avicenna (Ibn Sina, the father of modern medicine), Ibn Battuta (a scholar who spent thirty years traveling and writing about his journeys, which were more extensive than Marco Polo’s), who were responsible for chemistry, trigonometry (furthering), algebra, cartography, nautical technology, and astronomy (many stars are still called by their original Arabic names), who gave us the numerals we use today, who translated the classics into Arabic (some of the only surviving texts from ancient Greece), and who produced forward thinkers like Al Khindi, Averroes (Ibn Rushd), Al Farabi (Alpharabius), Khayyam, Rumi, Ibn Sinnan, Khalil Gibran, and Al Ghazali to name just a few -- now tenously enmeshed in a rigid, non-secular ideology that defies the logic and lucid thinking of the aforementioned illustrious names?

I can go back into Islamic history and 911 to draw conclusions for the current state of affairs filling pages. But one has to merely look at the past thirty years to see the causes of this transformation. Thirty years ago this community was on a path of modernity, of this transformation. Thirty years ago this community was on a path of modernity, but now it looks to the past for outmoded doctrines to guide them into the future? This unrealistic attempt to bridge the Sharia to the current era has resulted in ideology that is mostly rickety and praetorian. This gives rise to extreme fringe elements that are free to interpret the Sharia for their selfish means. There is another reason for this rash rush towards an appearance of solidarity by reversion, and it is -- that the Muslim world sees itself and its culture under siege by the west. It is easy to deduce these sentiments by the notable events which have taken place in the last thirty years. There was the creation of Israel in the heart of the Middle East some sixty years ago which displaced about a million Palestinians, and after the 1967 war it has become quite obvious to them that no one is listening to the plight of the Palestinians in the occupied territory as they themselves are quite powerless against a military juggernaut like Israel (remember also that the Muslims faced towards Dome of the Rock to pray before Mecca). This one event has slowly fostered into their psyche like a cancer over time: it has finally metastasized and spread throughout the Islamic world with the advent of information technology and global news in the last thirty years. Soon after this came the exodus of Palestinians into southern Lebanon and its occupation, and the Sabra Shatila massacre of the Palestinian refugees. The early nineties brought the four year siege of Sarajevo and the massacre of Muslims in Srebrenica. The mid to late nineties brought two Chechnya wars, and the geographic and economic strangulation of occupied territories of Gaza and West Bank. The late nineties also brought the ethnic cleansing of Muslim Kosovo's by the Serbs. This early millennium has brought the bloody wars of Iraq and Afghanistan (both of which still continue), the bombing of Lebanon, and the assault on Gaza which was declared inhumane by an independent UN war commission.

The Muslim community has done poorly to keep itself off the media’s radar since 911, but the rhetoric of racially tinged ridicule of this community in the media, and the poor depiction of their culture has reached a new nadir (an Arabic term by way of Spanish). Almost nothing seems to be off limits to the comics and talking heads, and the cultural insensitivities are simply brazen. This sort of rhetoric does nothing to mend relationship with the west which is already quite deteriorated. Although I may not agree with the extreme isolationist reaction by the Muslim community for being culminated, I can, however, see how this metamorphosis of ideology has precipitated in just thirty years.

Against BRT: Streets are for People, Not Buses

By Peter Smith
Tue May 04 08:44:00 -0700 2010

Proponents of bus rapid transit (BRT) have often engaged in a form of propaganda known as ‘Lying by omission’—omitting important facts to deliberately leave someone with a misconception. It is common in our history textbooks, and on Fox News.

Some BRT facts you may not know: BRT poster city, Bogota, has toxic air pollution (prompting a Tucson-based bicycle advocate/lawyer to describe Bogota as “a pre-apocalyptic technological dystopia”) caused largely by their massive diesel-powered BRT bus system. Transmilenio. BRT did not cause a mode shift from cars to buses except by a government-enforced alternate-day private automobiles ban (based on license plate number). Still, per-capita car ownership continues to rise in Bogota year after year. Mexico City also bans private automobiles -- but only one day per week. Instead of riding the Mexico City BRT one day a week, however, residents bought a second car--driving up air pollution even further.

Why, then, all the BRT hoopla? One reason is that big money from BP, Shell, Volvo, and other oil, bus, auto concerns fund an ever-expanding list of “think tanks” like WRI and ITDP, and blog networks like TheCityFix.com. These outfits pump out an impressive amount of pro-BRT propaganda. Other BRT advocates are well-intentioned, but wrong--wishing this failed bus technology would succeed, they argue, ‘if only it were done right’. BRT has been around for over 30 years, but apparently the world has yet to see BRT done right. Still other BRT proponents are too cynical to believe that offering citizens dignified transit and a livable city is possible anymore. We deserve better than what BRT advocates are offering.

Protecting 60-ft long, 41,000-pound bendy buses from hulking, brutish Priuses may be a worthy goal, but why not protect cyclists and would-be cyclists first? The number one reason people do not bike to their destinations is because they are terrified of the untamed beasts which slash and burn through our streets. We fear motorcycles, cars, trucks, and especially buses. This deterrent-to-cycling effect, not pollution, is the greatest negative externality produced by motorized traffic.

BRT advocates are too focused on motorized transportation. The Federal Department of Transportation has declared that “motor-
ized transportation will no longer be favored at the expense of non-motorized”—it is time for Berkeley to follow suit.

The ‘transit problem’ can best be addressed by reducing car- and transit-dependence. This can be done with better land-use decision-making, and by allowing people to walk and bike. We do not have to coax anyone onto a bike—we only need to give them the option of walking and biking with dignity. That means cyclists need their own space on major roads, separated from fast-moving motorized traffic. A simple bike lane is a start, but most people will never be comfortable cycling right next to fast-moving, multi-thousand-pound, free-moving chunks of glass and steel—so we need physical separation, known as ‘protected bike lanes’.

Walk and bike transportation solutions are proven: cycletracks, protected bike lanes, buffered bike lanes, regular bike lanes, sharrows, traffic-calmed streets, pedestrian bulb-outs, leading pedestrian intervals, formal and legal priority for non-motorized over motorized transport—these are the hallmarks of a civilized streetscape and an enlightened, decent, and fair society. These solutions are inexpensive and effective—good for taxpayers, motorists, cyclists and walkers, businesses, children and parents—good for Berkeley.

Give pedestrians and cyclists the priority and space they need and deserve on our most important corridors—especially our most important corridors. Traffic-calmed neighborhood streets are great for those who don’t have anywhere to go, but for those who would cycle often if given the opportunity, we need to be able to travel on the most direct routes from Point A to Point B, just like cars. And cars have engines—if there is not enough room to accomodate both motorized and non-motorized traffic, then cars can take the long way around.

Sprawl is bad for sustainability. Whether in the form of cars, high speed rail, commuter/express rail, BRT, rapid and regular buses, light rail, and even airplanes and streetcars to a certain extent, rapid transit enables and even induces sprawl. Those interested in sustainability should think very carefully about supporting any sprawl-enabling transportation solution that will not draw people out of their cars, the most harmful of all the sprawl-enabling technologies. Bus rapid transit (BRT) has never drawn people out of their cars, in any part of the world.

Toronto is discussing protected bike lanes for their University Avenue. San Francisco continues to experiment with protected bike lanes on that all-important of corridors, Market Street. Washington, DC is stripping bike lanes down the middle of Pennsylvania Avenue. Knowing which trends to follow is a leadership quality all its own—Berkeley can once again be a leader in bicycle infrastructure by becoming an intelligent follower.

The transit-dependent are often pitied when fare hikes and service cuts come around, as they invariably do, but missing from the discourse is talk of the responsibility that we all bear in forcing these citizens into this situation in the first place. Everyone is hailed if we can help stave off the most outrageous fare hikes and the most draconian service cuts (tax hikes in disguise), but rarely are we held accountable for failling to address the root causes of transit dependence—namely, streets which are not suitable for walking or biking. Let’s reduce this dependence by making biking a viable option for everyone from the ages of 8 to 80.

Likely side effects of favoring non-motorized over motorized transportation include, but are not limited to: reduced air and noise pollution, healthier and happier citizens (including reduced childhood obesity and related Type 2 diabetes), less traffic congestion, revitalized small businesses and town centers, higher worker productivity, reduced crime, expanded economic opportunity, a restored social fabric, safer, livelier, and more-interesting streets and places, and reduced risk that ‘chocolate milk’ will wash up on our shores.

Peter Smith is a walking, cycling, livable streets, and co-operatives advocate.

The Berkeley Divestment Campaign and the Problem of Antisemitism

By Ronald Hendel
Tue May 04 14:28:00 -0700 2010

In the wake of the emotional debate about the divestment bill in the Berkeley Student Senate (titled, “A Bill In Support of UC Divestment from War Crimes”)[1], a number of antisemitic incidents have occurred on campus. Most notably, last week there were two instances of large swastikas drawn on the walls of student dorms. We don’t know if the perpetrators were mischief-makers or sociopaths. During the official public discussion of the bill, some participants uttered offensive speech. One woman accosted a yarmulke-clad man and said, “You really look like a Nazi.” Later that evening a male student shouted to a group of Jewish students, “You killed Jesus.” On the one hand, the perpetrators of these and other recent antisemitic gestures are exceptions to the normal standard of behavior at Berkeley, which generally prizes tolerance of ethnic, racial, and religious minorities. On the other hand, tolerance for the rights of others has taken a beating during this emotion-laden debate.

The problem is neatly summarized by my faculty colleague, Judith Butler, a prominent supporter of the bill, with whom I will interact in my comments below. She wrote in 2003, “we distinguish between anti-semitism and forms of protest against the Israeli state (or right-wing settlers who sometimes act independently of the state), acknowledging that sometimes they do, disturbingly, work together.” [2] This is the problem: critical speech about the policies of the government of Israel sometimes works together with, or excites, antisemitism. Most people who protest against Israeli policies or actions are not themselves antisemites, nor do they indulge in antisemitic speech or actions. But sometimes these critics produce what Butler elsewhere calls “excitable speech,” that is, speech that has the capability of suppressing, subordinating, and “othering” a particular group.[3] Antisemitic speech is an obvious example of excitable speech. Calling Jews “Nazis” or “Christ-killers” is excitable hate-speech, which performs the effect of anathematizing and dehumanizing in the speech-act itself.

But what of speech or actions that are clearly not antisemitic, but which can have the effect of exciting or inciting antisemitic speech or actions by others? Butler rightly maintains that speech or actions critical of Israel must not be silenced by the fear of being wrongly understood by others as antisemitic. She writes:

I agree with Butler’s position. We must create a space where legitimate political criticism of Israel is clearly distinguished from antisemitism. I maintain that the best way to create this space is to insist on clear and reasoned political discourse, which
eschews propagandistic methods and deceptive half-truths. In other words, we should reject the kinds of visceral and angry words that one often sees on Fox News (on the right), MSNBC (on the mid-left), and the radical media (on the far left). We should reject the tone of discourse that has colored this debate on the Berkeley campus. To cite an enlightening philosophical tract by Harry Frankfurt, we should eschew “bullshit.”[5]

Frankfurt defines bullshit as speech that is not only deceptive and untruthful, but that is oblivious to its untruthfulness. It is speech that simply doesn’t care about being truthful, since it has other ends, such as selling products, political positions, or personalities. For example, the title of the divestment bill at Berkeley is “A Bill In Support of UC Divestment from War Crimes.” Now, every person of good will opposes war crimes. Such a bill ought to be as controversial and divisive as a bill in support of motherhood and apple pie. But this bill’s title is obviously deceptive, since the content of the bill is entirely devoted to criticism of Israel. [6] Serious allegations have indeed been made against Israel for violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the supplementary Protocol in its war with Gaza and its settlements in the West Bank. These allegations ought to be fully investigated and, if substantiated, the perpetrators ought to be punished and restitution made. I think most people of good will would agree. But to insinuate that Israel is the sole or primary perpetrator of war crimes in the world, the Middle East, or in the Israel/Palestine conflict is an obvious falsehood.

The bill brazenly says that it is using “the Israel/Palestine conflict” simply “as a case-study.” But it omits the relevant detail that the Hamas government of Gaza has been accused of war crimes by the very same human rights groups that have accused Israel. This omission falsifies the bill’s claim to address war crimes in the Israel/Palestine conflict. The bill also condemns Israel’s blockade of Gaza, but omits the relevant detail that Egypt is a partner in the blockade. In other words, the bill isn’t about war crimes as a global or regional issue, nor is it about war crimes in the Israel/Palestine conflict. It is only about criticizing and stigmatizing Israel, and in so doing it seeks to create a semantic association between “Israel” and “war crimes” as if the two terms were analogous or synonymous. This is, according to Frankfurt’s definition, an obvious case of bullshit. The bill doesn’t even care that it is untruthful, since truthfulness is not its goal. Its goal is to portray Israel as a pariah nation, as the instantiation of the evil of war crimes.

This kind of bullshit, if it is slung properly, creates an intelligible space where Israel is promoted as the world’s misfortune. From this cognitive space, the jump to the inference that the Jews are the world’s misfortune is a small one. With some trepidation, I would like to cite an illustration of this dangerous slippage from Butler’s recently published speech in support of the bill. [7] She begins with her moral education, which roots her remarks in Jewish authenticity:

The worst injustice, I learned, was to remain silent in the face of criminal injustice. And this tradition of Jewish social ethics was crucial to the fights against Nazism, fascism and every form of discrimination, and it became especially important in the fight to establish the rights of refugees after the Second World War. Of course, there are no strict analogies between the Second World War and the contemporary situation, and there are no strict analogies between South Africa and Israel, but there are general frameworks for thinking about [such matters].

In these stirring comments, Butler attests that her criticism of Israeli policies is based on Jewish social ethics, which are intrinsically opposed to Nazism, fascism, and discrimination. I don’t doubt her sincerity. But by framing her criticism of Israel with an ethical stand against Nazism, she implicitly proposes an analogy between Nazi Germany and Israel. She both acknowledges and qualifies this analogy in her statement: “Of course, there are no strict analogies between the Second World War and the contemporary situation, and there are no strict analogies between South Africa and Israel.” But by saying “there are no strict analogies,” a phrase that she repeats twice, she implicitly affirms that there are general or loose analogies, the scope and content of which she does not address.

Since the implied analogies among Israel, Nazi Germany, and Apartheid South Africa are left open, Butler’s speech creates a semantic gap that asks to be filled in by the listener. Her statement seems to perform what she seems to deny, that is, the establishment of an ethical analogy among these regimes. I would suggest that this rhetorical strategy is a perspicuous example of excitable speech, which aims to anathematize and “other” Israel as the world’s contemporary misfortune, just as the analogous states were in the past. If to some degree Israel ≈ Nazi Germany ≈ Apartheid South Africa, then of course we should hate it. This is propagandistic speech, characterized by inflammatory half-truths, and which seems unconcerned with its truth-content. It is speech that lends at least qualified support to those who would lump together these nations as instantiations of evil. The accusations of “Nazi” and “Apartheid” pepper contemporary anti-Israel discourse, and such accusations clearly create a space that excites and incites antisemitic speech and acts.

I want to be clear: I am not accusing Butler of intending or condoning antisemitism in her criticisms of Israel. But I do want to point out that, as she says of these types of discourse, “sometimes they do, disturbingly, work together.” We need to be self-critical and vigilant to ensure that our political debates do not shade into or excite antisemitic speech and actions. The only way to do this is to eschew half-truths, deceptions, propaganda, and “bullshit.” Only by embracing the virtues of clear thought and rational discourse can we hope to create a space where political diversity and ethical community can coexist. To this end, we must be careful not to sow the seeds of hatred. As the biblical prophet Hosea says, “They who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind.” We are responsible for exercising our free speech with malice towards none if we truly want to change the world.

N.B. This speech was delivered at a rally against antisemitism in Sproul Plaza on April 30, 2010.

[1] The text of the bill is available at http://www.asuc.org/documentation/view.php?type=bills&kid=2017. The initial vote in favor of the bill was vetoed by the Student Senate President, and the veto was subsequently sustained by the Senate.


[6] The last sentence, added in committee, raises the possibility of future resolutions against Morocco and the Congo.
Letters to the Editor

Mon May 03 22:42:00 -0700 2010

AC Transit’s Bus Rapid Transit Environmental Review Process

What a corruption of NEPA and CEQA! Folks, that’s how the process is supposed to work, you start with the draft and if out of it comes citizen formulation of new alternatives, you assess and include them in the final. How expressive of a most unimaginative and unconstructive misuse of the law, frustrating rather than promoting effective public participation.

Antonio Rossmann
Lecturer in Land Use and Water Resources Law at Boalt (Berkeley Law School).

2701 Shattuck Condo Site

The sliver of open land at 2701 Shattuck Avenue, next to U.C. Storage building, has seen condo proposals come and go since Rev. Gordon Choyce, pastor of the Missionary Church of God in Christ, bought the property for $1.475 million in 2004. A couple condo plans got the neighborhood’s thumbs-up; a couple plans got thumbs-down. Obviously the thumbs-up projects never got the thumbs-up. Let’s see where they go now.

Johnny Allen Shaw

Stopping Leaks

Let’s pray we have the technology and political will to cap this massive oil leak. But we do have the technology to implement a truly clean energy economy and to lead the planet into doing so.

David Weinstein

No BRT in Berkeley

If the issues weren’t so important to Berkeley I could once again, really get a good belly laugh out of Becky O’Malley’s editorial on Bus Rapid Transit last week. The title was; Berkeley Council Rejects “Full Build” BRT….. You would have thought that a “majority” of the council was against “studying” how a bus rapid transit system would effect Berkeley, that a “majority” of the city council took a “head in the sand” position by rejecting a proposition to “study” BRT, therefore dooming this “possibly” positive addition to public transportation in Berkeley for the foreseeable future.

However, nothing could be further from the truth. Only two members of the Berkeley City Council voted against this study, a resounding rejection by the council, according to O’Malley. With eight council members present at the meeting five votes were needed to pass a resolution to “study” BRT, not adopted BRT, but to “study” how this innovative public transportation option would effect Berkeley.

The only grain of truth in O’Malley’s editorial was that the council had four members voting yes (50% present at the meeting) and 2 members voting no. The other two members could not make up their minds one way or the other and abstained, and the motion to study was defeated by not having the 5th vote in favor.

A real “rejection” by our city leaders; not in my opinion, but a real plus for O’Malley, the Berkeley Daily Planet and the party of NO in Berkeley.

Terry Doran

Columnists

SENIOR POWER: ”Age Strong! Live Long!”

By Helen Rippier Wheeler

Tue May 04 19:12:00 -0700 2010

May is Older Americans Month. Older than what?, I ask and receive a dull look. 55? 60? 65? It all depends…

This year’s theme -- “Age Strong! Live Long!” -- recognizes the diversity and vitality of today’s older Americans who span 3 generations.

A meeting with the National Council of Senior Citizens resulted in President John F. Kennedy designating May 1963 as Senior Citizens Month, encouraging the nation to pay tribute to older people across the country. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter’s proclamation changed the name to Older Americans Month, a time to celebrate those 65 and older through ceremonies, events and public recognition.

Elders are getting some positive attention because more people are living longer. Old people in general are better educated, retiring earlier and living longer. Accord-
ing to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of people age 65 or older has tripled over the past 50 years to a record 420 million worldwide.

The way a society (the dominant culture) perceives a person or a group of people can restrict and assign them to certain roles. In 1940, Bernard M. Baruch (1870-1975) -- then 70 years old -- declared “Aging is not ‘lost youth’ but a new stage of opportunity and strength.” The 20th Century did not find the secret of eternal youth. A term coined in France described the period of active old age as the ‘third age,’ following the ‘first age’ of childhood and youth and the ‘second age’ of adult maturity. The later, less active and independent phase of life was the ‘fourth age.’ (Read more about this in Pat Thane’s splendid book, “A history of old age,” published by the J Paul Getty Museum in 2005.)

“Forever young?” asks the May 2010 issue of Consumer Reports, and responds with “What works -- and what doesn’t -- in the ongoing quest for youth.” Baldness remedies, hiding hair loss, hair dyes (rated on a scale of 10 for gray coverage), and anti-wrinkle serums (“inflated claims and limited results”) are evaluated.

One’s image can influence the way a person sees her or himself. It can also impact opportunities for employment, pension income, legal equity and health.

The bulletin board announces that a man and his sons, ages 5 and 7, “challenge” residents of a low-income senior/disabled housing project to scrabble and dominos. Someone has scribbled “BRIDGE CHESS POKER” across it.

Members of a group of senior citizens (women) and a disabled person (man) are urged to volunteer. Crocheting is imposed as an example. Silence. Each is then queried regarding current volunteering, in a double whammy of ageism involving both role assignment and assumption.

Ageism is any discrimination against people on the basis of chronological age. Referring to a person’s age in a context in which age is not relevant reinforces society’s emphasis on youth as the optimum stage of life. In the workforce, “older workers” become another group to be demeaned or protected. In the media, women are often designated as ‘grandmothers.’

The metaphor for happiness is youth. Advertisers sell images of happiness and well-being. Consider TV commercials’ biased role assignments, stereotypes and image distortion (toothpaste or Coke, for example). Senior groups, service providers, and academics in the United States and Canada note that ageism can be a factor in elder abuse.

The cautious health system, allied with pharmaceutical companies, imposes “consulting family members” while the demographics of aging clearly show that old people often do not have families. Possibly, they are happily single, never married, widowed… Moreover, many have never been parents, let alone grandparents.

A University of Florida study report contends that contemporary children’s books now depict upbeat, active and wise grandparents. Do you agree? A generation ago they were portrayed in children’s literature as grumpy, mean or doddering. Today, when old people (let’s say age 65+) appear in picture books, easy books, comics and stories, they are still too often characterized as grandparents or in ageist ways that connote illness, disability or death.

Ways to analyze children’s books for positive images are similar to those applicable to racism and sexism. When selecting library books, book purchases for children, and books to read to and with them: Look for portrayals of aging as a natural and lifelong process-- old workers, old people in the community, old leaders, famous old people, active and capable old people, similarities between young and old, and intergenerational activities.

Consider the author’s or illustrator’s background and perspective. Yes, a book that deals with the feelings and insights of an old person should be more carefully examined if written by a young person. And be careful when selecting reviewers.

Consider the latest copyright date. Although a recent copyright date does not guarantee relevance or sensitivity, the year a book was published can be a clue as to the content’s ageist, racist or sexist concepts, illustrations or terms.

Look for and reject language and illustrations that may be ageist. Watch out for authors and reviewers who misuse words like eccentric, elderly, feisty, geezer, spry, spunky. Reject sexist language and adjectives that exclude or ridicule old women; generic use of the word ‘man’ is outmoded.

For an email attached list of some Pre K - Grade 6 – YP good books published within the current decade that are in print and or libraries’ collection(s), email pen136@dslextreme.com.

+++ The number of conferences concerned with aging and scheduled worldwide in the next few months is impressive. Here are a few of those being held in Canada and the U.S.: On May 13, a “Silver Economy Summit: An aging population will change how you do work...are you ready?” begins in Halifax. Also in May, the International Society for Gerontechnology holds its 7th World Conference, in Vancouver. In September, “Connecting Research & Education to Care in Seniors’ Mental Health” will be considered, in Halifax; October will see the 5th International Dementia Conference, in Penticton, and November, the 2nd Conference on Positive Aging, in Vancouver.

Meanwhile, in the United States, the Florida Conference on Aging meets in August in Orlando. In September, there’s the 2010 International Conference on Aging in the Americas, in Austin; in November, the annual meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, New Orleans.

Helen Ripper Wheeler can be reached at pen136@dslextreme.com.

No email attachments; use “Senior Power” for subject.

Arts & Entertainment

A Reader Recommends: La Fiesta

By Dorothy Snodgrass
Mon May 03 21:40:00 -0700 2010

“South of the Border, down Mexico Way” might well be the theme song of one of Berkeley’s favorite restaurants, “La Fiesta.” Entering through the handsome gates of this marvelous Mexican restaurant, one indeed feels transported to old Mexico. With its Spanish revival furniture and Diego Rivera reproductions lining the walls, dining at La Fiesta is a joy.

thanks in great part to the restaurant’s owners, Mario and Rosalinda Tejada, who
have served authentic, inexpensive meals for more than three generations.

Back in February, 2009, the Tejadas reluctantly announced that they were forced to give up their original restaurant, located at the corner of Telegraph and Haste Street, due to the poor economy and low patronage. Fortunately for us, however, La Fiesta moved a block away into the charming small building at 2506 Haste Street, across from People’s Park. Most of their dishes are prepared as you order them, so you must allow time when you visit. But where else would you find these authentic Mexican dishes at such low prices -- enchiladas, Chile Rellenos, Tostadas, Tamales -- all just $2.60 each? Margaritas are priced at a mere $3.50, Mexican Hot Chocolate, $2.00. Dinner combinations are a modest $7.85.

When visiting the restaurant, you might want to walk back to the rear, entering a courtyard with a fountain filled with flowers, and, not surprisingly, a large painting of the Virgin Mary. This courtyard would be an ideal place for private parties.

So, for a thoroughly enjoyable dining experience, I would suggest you treat yourself to lunch or dinner at La Fiesta, receiving a warm welcome from Mario and Rosalinda, two of Berkeley’s beloved citizens. A word of warning, though; since they’re not open every day, you’ll want to make reservations. (510) 848-2588.

A Reader Recommends:
Jerusalem, the East Side Story

By Annette Herskovits
Tue May 04 12:41:00 -0700 2010

“Jerusalem: the East Side Story”
a film by Mohammed Alatar
Friday May 7 at 7 pm
Fellowship Hall, 1924 Cedar, at Bonita
Fourth in Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists’ Palestine film series:
“Palestine: Occupied Lives, Non-Violence and Steadfastness”
Donation appreciated: no one turned away for lack of funds
Wheelchair accessible
To benefit the Palestine Children’s Relief Fund

In 1948, the western part of Jerusalem fell under Israeli control; in 1967, the eastern part fell under Israeli occupation. Since then, Israel has pursued a policy of Judaizing the city, aiming to achieve “Jewish demographic superiority.” Part of this policy is to drive out Palestinian Muslims and Christians, denying their presence, history, and ties to the land.

Israel has constructed a ring of Jewish settlements that cuts Jerusalem—the center of Palestinians’ religious, cultural, and economic life—from the rest of the West Bank. The film shows the effects of these policies on Palestinians. Families watch in desperation as giant bulldozers demolish their home. Some live in tents across from their homes, evicted to make room for Jewish settlers. Crowds tussle to obtain permits to go worship at Al Aksa mosque, the Muslim heart of Jerusalem. The many who fail to obtain permits on time pray in the streets. Families are separated by an absurd system of permits.

The film includes interviews with Palestinian and Israeli leaders, human rights activists and political analysts.


A discussion will follow the film. It will be led by Palestinian-American Nabil Wahbeh, who is from Jerusalem and had to leave following Israel’s conquest of East Jerusalem in 1967.

Home & Garden
Nice Day in Berkeley Draws a Thousand Tourers to BAHA, Natives Events

By Steven Finacom
Tue May 04 19:10:00 -0700 2010

A Hobbit-like two-story cottage was a surprise in a splendid Berkeley garden on the BAHA tour that also featured a chain of three ponds and lush tropic plantings behind an elegant brown shingle.
Hundreds of Berkeleyans and visitors to town turned out in picture-perfect spring weather on Sunday, May 2, 2010 to attend two tours.

At least 1,000 paying guests and volunteers thronged the Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association (BAHA) annual house tour featured 8 properties designed by Julia Morgan.

The self-guided walking tour included chamber music, a magnificent mansion in the Claremont, the house of an early UC professor largely unchanged from its 1905 character, and a hidden gem of a wood timbered garage.

Hundreds more went on the "Bringing Back the Natives" garden tour that extended several properties in Berkeley, from the San Pablo Avenue flatlands to the crest of the hills.

Some managed to squeeze in parts of both tours, with the Natives excursion starting three hours before the BAHA tour.

Arts & Events Calendars

CLASSICAL MUSIC-EAST BAY THROUGH MAY 16

Tuesday May 04 11:05:00 -0700 2010

BERKELEY ART MUSEUM AND PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE

“Soul’s Light,” May 9, 3 p.m. Program features works by Rossi, Barber, Whitacre and others. $8. (415) 331-5544.
2626 Bancroft Way, Berkeley. <

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF BERKELEY


“Volta Concert: Nocturnes,” May 14, 8 p.m. Program features works by Morten Lauridsen, Robin Estrada, Ted Heanen and Donald Crockett. $20-$30.

FIRST COVENANT CHURCH OF OAKLAND

“New Day for Children,” May 16, 3:30 p.m. Featuring Tiskela Celtic Harp Trio, Bay Area Youth Harp Ensemble, Bay Area Children’s Harp Ensemble, Patten University Symphonette, Gero Nimu Band and the Chronicles. $10.

HERTZ HALL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

University Symphony Orchestra, May 7 through May 8, 8 p.m. David Mines conducts a program featuring works by Schumann and Shostakovich. $5-$15. (510) 642-9988.

NORTHBRAE COMMUNITY CHURCH

“Rachmaninoff, Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom and Bartok, Hungarian Folk Songs,” May 16, 4 p.m. Program features Rachmaninoff’s “Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom” and Bartok’s “Slovak Folk Songs.” $12-$15.
941 The Alameda, Berkeley. <

PARAMOUNT THEATRE

Oakland East Bay Symphony, May 14 and May 16, Friday, 8 p.m.; Sunday, 2 p.m. Program features Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and Jake Heggie’s “The Deepest Desire:

ST. DAVID OF WALES CHURCH

5641 Esmond Ave., Richmond. <

ST. JOSEPH THE WORKER CHURCH

“J.S. Bach in B Minor,” May 9, 4:30 p.m. Program features performances Elspeth Franks (soprano), Sonia Gariaeff (alto), Brian Thorsett (tenor) and Hugh M. Davis (baritone).

ST. MARK’S EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF BERKELEY


TRINITY CHAMBER CONCERTS

Suzanne Macahilig, May 8, 8 p.m. The pianist performs works by Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Chopin. $8-$12.

ChamberBridge, May 15, 8 p.m. Program features works by Gabriela Lena Frank and a work written for ChamberBridge by Christian Henking. $8-$12.