Chances are you didn’t know that the Berkeley City Council was planning to abandon Old City Hall and move in with the Berkeley Unified School District for council meetings when BUSD finishes remodeling the old West Campus site to house its new administrative headquarters. I certainly didn’t, and a quick poll of six knowledgeable citizens encountered at the Farmer’s Market yesterday (the type often called activists) suggests that a lot of other people don’t know either. I even called a councilmember to check, and he seemed surprised too.

I got wind of the plan for the first time when listening to last week’s City Council budget workshop online. The budget will be officially discussed in open session next week, on May 17th, but a bit of side chat between the manager and the dais during last Tuesday’s workshop let the cat out of the bag, so to speak.

City Manager Phil Kamlarz and Councilmember Linda Maio were talking about the staff’s draft budget, which is supposed to be dealing with the city’s sizeable fiscal shortfall. It had not been available for council or public in advance of the meeting, certainly not in time for that morning’s “press briefing” which we didn’t bother to attend, guessing correctly that it would be content-shy data-free PR fluff.

The staff intended the workshop presentation to be PowerPoint all the way. As the meeting started, Deputy City Manager Christine Daniel announced that the council wouldn’t get hard copies of the draft document with line item figures until the meeting was over. Councilmember Worthington was compelled to insist that the copies (which had already been printed and were in the building) be handed out to councilmembers immediately so they could have figures in front of them during the discussion.

Councilmember Maio, who sits at the Mayor’s right hand and prompts him when necessary, asked about a line item she spotted on the capital improvements page in the draft which she’d just gotten. “…We will be vacating this building [Old City Hall, re-named the Maudelle Shirek Building],” she said. “Not sure how we’re planning to…”?

Kamlarz answered: “On that list, we have roughly $400,000, $500,000 to relocate the Council chambers to joint chambers with the school district...To retrofit this building is closer to $30 million, $40 million...”

Maio’s response (rising inflection, plaintive tone): “When I explain that we may not be meeting here over the long term, everyone wants to know what will happen to this building which we all love because we drive by it all the time. It’s one of our historic treasures. The answer is right now we don’t know, can’t say.”

Kamlarz: “Well…when we last went to a ballot measure to fix this building it got kind of creamed.”

Maio: “Right. We did put a ballot measure on to raise funds to retrofit this building and make it seismically safe and preserve it.”

Kamlarz: “And that did not pass. Issues about seismic safety, infrastructure is shot...And it’s major repairs to the building right now. The plan is to secure the building until we can develop a long-term plan to ... get $30 million, $40 million to retrofit this building.”

Maio: “We may have to figure out preservation money or something. …”

Later in the meeting, when the council was discussing hypothetical new sources of revenue, Councilmember Susan Wengraf asked about underutilized property: “I know we … own lots of property all over town….I’m wondering if you are looking at underutilized properties and selling them.”

Kamlarz answered: “Yes. …we are looking at getting rid of our
surplus property. ...."

Wengraf: “And when we vacate this building is it possible to rent this building or lease it or is it not possible?”

Kamlarz (laughing): “I think one of the issues is that...nothing works in the building.”

Wengraf: “You want to do tenant improvements.”

Kamlarz: “Get the elevator, the heating, the lighting...while you’re at it, you might as well rebuild the whole building.”

Mayor Bates: “Maybe we can sell it...it’s also not earthquake safe and costs 30 million to repair.”

Kamlarz: “And has a cement ceiling.”

So what’s the plan?

Well, from BUSD’s side, it’s mentioned in passing on a web page: “The Berkeley Unified School District is in the process of renovating the classroom building ‘C’ on Bonar Street at the West Campus site to house the Central Office Administration; Technology; classrooms and a Teacher Learning Center. The adjacent cafeteria building (located on Browning St.) will also be rehabilitated for BUSD School Board, City Council and other public meetings. Watch this page for photos of the construction as the work progresses.”

The photos show only interior demolition of Building C in progress—no word on what kind of facility if any is being prepared for Council meetings in the cafeteria.

Anyone who has ever tried to attend a controversial city council meeting knows that the present council chambers are inadequate. The audience can’t see or hear very well, and frequently overflows down the stairs and into the lobby, often necessitating police presence to keep order (with accompanying overtime). A major feature of the Citizens’ Sunshine Ordinance, soon to be on the ballot, is requiring provision of adequate space for the public to watch what the council’s up to.

Disabled citizens, led by the late Councilmember Dona Spring, have frequently complained about accessibility. Dona once led a press tour via BART to the new Hayward City Hall, which features many amenities besides excellent accessibility, including piped-in internet at every council seat so that constituents can text in questions and comments during meetings.

But how do we know that whatever deal is being planned between the City of Berkeley and BUSD will solve our problems? Where’s the public process to discuss what might be needed? How about a little sunshine in the decision-making?

With all its faults, Berkeley’s Old City Hall is a beautiful building listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It looks suspiciously like it’s being subjected to the same process of Demolition by Neglect which has shadowed Berkeley’s public libraries and might lead to scrapping two of them.

At the same budget workshop where the city staff’s plans to move the council meetings were revealed, Mayor Bates suggested a remedy for the budget crisis: “At some point, I don’t want to do it, but I think we will have to go back to the citizens and say this is what we’re doing, spending as prudently as we can, maintaining a good bond rating, trying to do the best job we can. At some point we can’t reach it without getting something more revenue.”

English translation: They might want to go for a new ballot measure to add some sort of additional parcel tax or bond issue to raise more funds for continuing city services at their present level.

That’s well and good, and might even be necessary, but councilmembers need to be aware that the lack of transparency regarding the last round of library bonds, which has surfaced as a result of the Concerned Library Users suit, could create a real problem with the electorate for new projects. Even voters who claim to hate historic preservation have objected to two out of four branch libraries being demolished instead of restored as the language of that ballot measure promised. Preservation-minded voters might fear that they’re being asked to support another demolition scheme in sheep’s clothing.

And if the failure of the pools measure is any indication, voters are no longer complacentely willing to fund whatever’s on offer in any election, even if the pitch is truthful.

Rather than announcing the fate of the location of Council meetings as a fait accompli, there should be open public discussion of what the problems are, and the pros and cons of a variety of solutions. Here are a few possibilities, close to transit, within blocks of City Hall and already built: the new Freight and Salvage hall; the auditorium at the new Berkeley City College; the old Berkeley Community Theater, originally supposed to be jointly owned and operated by the City and BUSD on the Berkeley High site...and there are more, all within easy walking distance of downtown.

West Campus is relatively far from the action, and would probably impede rather than facilitate citizen attendance at meetings— but perhaps that’s the rationale behind what appears to be the current plan. At their next meeting on May 17th, the council has the opportunity to start a frank and open discussion of their impending move and the fate of the Maudelle Shirek Building, and they should do so.

News

Students Oppose Schwarzenegger’s Multi-Millionaire Regent Appointee

From Claudia Magaña, UCSA President, 3rd year student at UC Santa Cruz, and Christine Byon, UCSA Organizing and Communications Director

Wed May 11 17:31:00 -0700 2011

At the end of his term, former Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed a new member of the UC Board of Regents. Governor Schwarzenegger appointed David Crane, a multi-millionaire investor and former advisor with deep political and business connections to the former Governor. The UC Student Association is opposed to the appointment of David Crane.

The University of California system is in the middle of a terrible budgetary crisis. Tuition has risen dramatically in recent years and in-state enrollment is being cut severely. Now more than ever, the UC Regents are in need of appointees that have demonstrated a deep commitment and understanding of the UC system and the critical need to protect affordability and access for UC students.

Unfortunately, the appointment of David Crane is very much in the mold of many of the more recent appointees, where individuals have been chosen because of their connections to the Governor rather than their policy background or demonstrated commitment to the UC system.

UC students are deeply disappointed that students were not consulted about Mr. Crane’s appointment beforehand. It is unfathomable that the Governor would not consult students before making an appointment to the UC governing body. Despite being the official collective voice of UC students, UCSA was not consulted or notified before the appointment was made. Further, since his appointment to the UC Regents over four months ago, Mr. Crane has not reached out to the UC Student Association or, as far as we know, met with UC students in any formal capacity to hear about their concerns and experiences.

Finally, students also are deeply concerned by Mr. Crane’s recent comments questioning the value of collective bargain-
Students believe strongly in the critical importance of collective bargaining rights to secure fair wages and benefits for UC employees and other public employees. Particularly at a time when collective bargaining rights are under attack around the country, students find it disturbing that Mr. Crane would choose this time to raise questions about this fundamental and essential right for public employees.

“It is deeply troubling that students were not informed before this decision. The needs and views of students and workers must be prioritized in the appointment of UC Regents. That clearly was not done with Regent Crane’s appointment, and therefore UC students are opposed to his confirmation,” said Nelson Cortez, a student at UC Santa Cruz and member of the UCSA Board of Directors.

Above all, UC students take issue with a process that continues to lead to the appointment of well-connected millionaires, rather than policy experts with a demonstrated commitment to the values of the University, including access and affordability for students and fair wages and benefits for workers. Students believe that the UC system, as the crown jewel of our education system, deserves better than that. Students do not believe that Mr. Crane meets that standard at this point, and for that reason we oppose his nomination to the UC Regents.

The University of California Student Association is the official voice of over 200,000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students from the eleven UC campuses. It is our mission to advocate on behalf of current and future students for the accessibility, affordability, and quality of the University of California system.

Tomorrow is Bike to Work Day

By Steven Finacom
Wed May 11 10:37:00 -0700 2011

Cyclists gather at the Sproul Plaza energizer station on Bike To Work Day in 2009.

The families of Shane Bauer and Josh Fattal issued the following statement today:

The latest session of Shane and Josh’s trial did not take place as scheduled today. We do not yet know why Shane and Josh were not brought to court but we are even more deeply concerned for their health and welfare as a result of their non-appearance. Their unexplained absence from the hearing, and the fact that their lawyer Mr. Masoud Shafii continues to be denied access to Shane and Josh, is extremely troubling.

Locations of Energizer Stations in Berkeley.

Thursday, May 12, is “Bike to Work Day” nationally, and there is always a particularly robust East Bay set of activities.

Those who bicycle to work regularly, and those who travel to their job on two wheels for the first time or just for the day, can take advantage of a variety of services, prizes, and benefits.

There will be over 110 “energizer stations” at street corners and other strategic points in the East Bay, where cyclists can stop for morning refreshment and to pick up a free bag of items from food coupons to energy bars.

Nearly twenty stations will be in Berkeley and Albany, staffed by volunteers, including contingents from the Bicycle Friendly Berkeley Coalition and the UC Berkeley campus. At some of them staff from bicycle repair and sales shops will be on hand to do bicycle inspections and tune-ups.

In the Downtown Berkeley and UC campus area there are stations at Shattuck and Allston, University and Shattuck, Oxford and Hearst, and Telegraph and Bancroft (Sproul Plaza).

Additional stations will be at the Ashby and North Berkeley BART stations, and the pedestrian bridge overpass to the Berkeley Marina.

There is also a “Bike Away from Work Party” in the evening, 5:30 – 8:30 in the Old Oakland district, at Washington and 9th.

See the East Bay Bicycle Coalition website for full local details.

Bauer and Fattal Trial Delayed, Families Say

Thu May 12 09:19:00 -0700 2011

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Amyris: The Latest on a UC Berkeley-Spawned Agrofuel Firm
By Richard Brenneman
Tue May 10 20:33:00 -0700 2011

The disappearing Nikolai Yezhov, after Stalin purged his secret police chief.

Amyris, Inc., the creation of UC Berkeley bioengineer Jay Keasling and his students, has issued its latest financial filing, the 10-K form required by the Securities and Exchange Commission of all publicly traded corporations.

But before we get down to the dollars and sense, we’ll begin with a mystery.

The curious case of the vanishing founder

One of the most curious things about the Amyris corporate website is its rather peculiar revision of history. Click on the link for Our Story and you find three people named as the company’s founders, Kinkead Reiling, Neil Renninger, and Jack D. Newman.

Yet if you go to website of UC Berkeley’s Office of Intellectual Property and Industry Research Alliances you find this:

Amyris Biotechnologies was launched in 2003 by Jay Keasling, professor of Chemical Engineering and Bioengineering at UC Berkeley and the director of the Berkeley Center for Synthetic Biology.

For some very odd reason, Amyris has erased Keasling’s role as the corporation’s founder, and role which made him a very tidy pile of pelf.

Why has Keasling been excised, like one of those Old Bolsheviks erased [and without Photoshop] from historic pictures after Stalin’s purges? You’d think the company would exult in its founder, a man once named Discover Magazine’s Scientist of the Year.

It’s doubly odd, since Keasling’s new federally funded Joint BioEnergy Institute is right upstairs from Amyris headquarters in same building in beautiful downtown Emeryville.

Amyris announces its annual losses.
The full SEC filing is available here, but we’ll start with the company’s own press release, posted on Business Wire:

Amyris, Inc., which applies its industrial synthetic biology platform to provide renewable alternatives to select petroleum-sourced products used in specialty chemical and transportation fuel markets worldwide, today announced financial results for the first quarter ended March 31, 2011. Total revenues for the first quarter ended March 31, 2011 were $37.2 million versus $29.7 million in the prior quarter with Cost of Products Sold of $34.4 million versus $27.5 million. Research and Development expense increased to $19.7 million from $17.0 million and Sales, General and Administrative expense increased to $16.0 million from $11.0 million. First quarter GAAP net loss attributable to common stockholders was $33.1 million, compared with $25.6 million in the prior quarter. On a non-GAAP basis, the net loss attributable to Amyris, Inc. common stockholders was $29.1 million for the quarter, compared to $22.1 million in the prior quarter. A reconciliation of GAAP to non-GAAP results is included below.

The company’s balance of cash, cash equivalents and marketable securities was $227.2 million at the end of the first quarter versus $257.9 million at the end of the prior quarter.

“We continue to meet our critical milestones, including delivering our first renewable product to customers and completing our first commercial production facility,” said John Melo, CEO of Amyris. “These achievements clearly communicate that we have become a commercial operation, and our focus as a company is to ramp up our operations quickly to meet customer demand and deliver a growing portfolio of high-value, renewable products.”

So, the company is losing money, and more than before — which is typical of startups, especially in the risky business of biotechnology.

But don’t fear, says the guru of biotech investing

Vinod Khosla, who made a very fat pile as a cofounder of Sun Microsystems, is very bullish on Amyris.

After he left Sun, Khosla went on to become a general partner at Kleiner, Perkins, Caufield & Byers, a powerhouse player in the biotechnology and green energy sector and the company became a big Amyris investor after Khosla’s departure in 2004 to create his own green tech investment fund, Khosla Ventures.

While our search through Amyris filings didn’t find any Khosla money in the company, he told Cassandra Sweet of Dow Jones Newswires that Amyris is one hot property in a rapidly expanding agrofuel sector:

Khosla, who founded Sun Microsystems, currently heads venture capital firm Khosla Ventures, which has invested in several companies that make biofuels from cellulosic materials such as switchgrass, wood, and agricultural waste, among other companies. While next-generation biofuels makers have trouble competing against relatively low-priced petroleum fuels, they have focused on competing in the broader petrochemicals market on higher-priced products, he said. He cited biotechnology company Amyris Inc. (AMRS) as an example.

“They’re defining a path,” Khosla said. “If you can sell something for $10 a gallon as a specialty chemical rather than sell it for $3 a gallon as fuel, these companies are going to do this and sell their products in the highest-priced markets before going to the lowest-cost markets.”

And, indeed, that’s what they’re doing

While Amyris got its start with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to produce synthetic doses of the antimalarial drug artemisinin in the guts of genetically altered E. Coli bacteria, the company handed production off to French pharmaceutical giant Sanofi-Aventis [previously], which hasn’t been able to produce the compound any more cheaply than the plant-derived drug, which also happens to generate livelihoods for lots of Third World farmers.

And while the company promises it
will produce vast amounts of fuel to keep America’s wheels turning, the only thing the company has been able to produce for sale is squalene, a natural moisturizer used in cosmetics and pharmaceuticals and the same stuff that makes your nose shiny.

Here’s the company’s 28 February press release, titled “Amyris Sells First Renewable Product”:

Amyris, Inc. announced today that it has received the first purchase order for Amyris renewable squalane. This order was generated through collaboration with Amyris’s partner, Soliance, a leading green ingredient provider to the cosmetic industry based in France.

“Successful industrial production of our first renewable product to our first customer is a point of celebration for Amyris, validating the success of our platform and the value of our products,” said John Melo, CEO of Amyris. “We continue to scale our production while providing the reliable quality and delivery that our customers expect.”

“We believe we have a novel value proposition in the market,” said Frederique LaFosse, general manager of Soliance. “The combination of a reliable, high purity, renewable squalane can provide confidence to formulators the world over to use more of this best-in-class emollient.”

Squalane is a high-end moisturizing ingredient used in a wide range of cosmetics today, currently sourced from refined olive oil or shark liver oil. Amyris squalane is renewable, of high purity and excellent stability. It has been successfully tested by Soliance and potential customers. Amyris and Soliance believe squalane may be used for expanded consumer applications which today rely on non-sustainable materials. Amyris renewable squalane was produced by manufacturing Amyris’s Biofene™, Amyris renewable farnesene, and then converting it to squalane.

The first production plant comes online

On 29 April, Amyris announced it’s first production facility is up and ready to run — in Brazil.

The press release:

Amyris, Inc. (NASDAQ: AMRS) announced the completion of the first industrial-scale facility for the production of Biofene™. Amyris’s renewable farnesene. The production facility is located in Piracicaba, São Paulo, Brazil at a facility owned by Biomin do Brasil Nutrição Animal Ltda., a company focusing on animal nutrition. Amyris will operate the production facility and expects to begin Biofene production in May. To produce Biofene, Amyris feeds sugar cane syrup into three dedicated 200,000 liter fermenters containing Amyris proprietary yeast. The yeast digests the syrup feedstock and produce farnesene, which is then separated and purified. Biofene may then be sold directly into industrial applications or put through simple chemical finishing steps to form a broad range of renewable products including squalane, base oil and finished lubricants and diesel. To achieve production at full industrial scale, Amyris has developed an integrated scale-up process which connects ongoing advances in Amyris research with industrial-scale production. By miniaturizing process conditions found in production-scale fermentors, Amyris has been able to translate yeast performance successfully from discovery to production. Amyris further controls scale-up by testing performance in its pilot plant in Emeryville, Calif., followed by testing in a second pilot plant and a demonstration facility in Amyris’s operations in Campinas, Brazil. Earlier this year, Amyris tested its yeast strains and process in several runs at 100,000 and 200,000 liter scale and generated results that were consistent with previous runs at smaller scale.

“The completion of our first Biofene production facility is a landmark not only for Amyris but also for the renewable products sector,” said John Melo, CEO of Amyris. “With this milestone, we are demonstrating that engineered yeast may be used to produce high-value hydrocarbon molecules on a commercial scale. This achievement reinforces our goal of providing No Compromise® renewable alternatives to petroleum to transform the chemicals industry, extend the world’s fuel supply and contribute to the betterment of our environment.”

Amyris is scaling its production through contract agreements with manufacturers located in Brazil, Europe and the United States, and has five production agreements in place including contract agreements with Antibioticos S.A., Biomin, Paraño Bioenergia S.A., Tate & Lyle Ingredients Americas, Inc., an affiliate of Tate & Lyle PLC, and a joint venture with Usina São Martinho S.A., one of the largest sugar and ethanol producers in Brazil. Amyris has also established finishing capabilities with Glycotech, Inc.

Stephan Nielsen added some details in his Bloomberg account:

Amyris Inc., a U.S. biotechnology company, built its first industrial-scale facility to produce from sugar-cane syrup a compound that can be converted into a renewable fuel, tapping Brazil’s expensive cane industry for feedstock.

Brazil, the world’s largest sugar producer, is expected to crush 568.5 million tons of sugar cane this harvest, 2.1 percent more than last year, the Sao Paulo-based cane industry association Uniao da Industria de Cana-de-Acucar said in a statement.

Amyris, which will operate the plant, will spend less than $20 million for the facility that initially will generate 2.5 million liters a year, Chief Executive Officer John Melo said by telephone. It will be scaled up to produce 17 million liters in 18 months, he said.

Note: Those production figures, transformed into more familiar terms for our metric-challenged readers, amounts to only 528,000 annual gallons at the starting rate, scaling up to an annual 4,491,000 gallons in 18 months. By way of comparison, the United States consumes 378 million gallons of gasoline every single day, according to the federal Energy Information Administration.

So, no miraculous fuel replacements yet. Where the financial action is

Now, for the numbers wonks among our readers, we’ll take a look at where Amyris gets its money.

We’ll open with this from the company’s annual report on how the Amyris Initial Public Offering fared:

On September 30, 2010, the Company closed its initial public offering (“IPO”) of 5,300,000 shares of common stock at an offering price
of $16.00 per share, resulting in net proceeds to the Company of approximately $73.7 million, after deducting underwriting discounts of $5.9 million and offering costs of $5.2 million and in October 2010, the Company subsequently sold an additional 795,000 shares to the underwriters pursuant to the over-allotment option raising an additional $11.8 million of net proceeds. Upon the closing of the IPO, the Company’s outstanding shares of convertible preferred stock were automatically converted into 31,550,277 shares of common stock and the outstanding convertible preferred stock warrants were automatically converted into common stock warrants to purchase a total of 195,604 shares of common stock and shares of Amyris Brasil S.A. (“Amyris Brasil”) held by third party investors were automatically converted into 861,155 shares of the Company’s common stock. [Page 71]

As of 25 February, according to the report, the company had 43,849,226 shares outstanding.

The shares opened for public trading last September at $16.50 per share, peaked on 27 January at $33.89, and were trading today at last look at $24.75.

**Naming the major players**

The largest single shareholder is French oil giant Total SA, with its shares controlled by the president of its gas and power division, Philippe Boisseau, who is also a member of the Amyris board. As of 8 December, he managed 9,651,004 Amyris shares on behalf of Total.

Here’s the statement Amyris released 9 December after Boisseau joined the board:

> Amyris, Inc. announced today that Philippe Boisseau has joined the company’s board of directors. Mr. Boisseau is currently president of Total’s Gas & Power division. “Philippe brings exceptional perspective and experience to our Board,” said John Melo, chief executive officer of Amyris. “Philippe’s personal commitment to our company emphasizes the strong relationship we are building with our partner Total, a major international oil and gas company, and will help us tremendously as we ramp up our commercial operations.”

Boisseau, 48, graduated from the leading French engineering school Ecole Polytechnique, and has a master’s in particle physics. He began his career in 1986, serving in a number of French government ministries before joining Total in 1995. He worked in several management positions within the Refining and Marketing division in the US and France until 1998. Boisseau then moved to the Exploration and Production division and was appointed general manager of Total Austral in Argentina in 1999 and president, Middle East, between 2002 and 2007. Since then, he has been president of Total Gas & Power with the role to develop the downstream segment of the natural gas chain and alternative energies. He has been a member of Total’s Management Committee since January 2005.

> “Biotechnology broadens perspectives for the development of industrial production in which Total has decided to position itself, and Amyris is at the heart of our initiatives in this area,” said Boisseau. “I am excited to be personally engaged in helping Amyris grow to fulfill its extraordinary potential.”

In June, Amyris and Total announced a strategic partnership encompassing Total’s investment in Amyris and a wide-spectrum master development and collaboration agreement. Total currently owns 22% of Amyris and, under their collaboration agreement, Total and Amyris R&D teams will work together to develop and commercialize certain renewable products.

Another major holder is TPG Capital, formerly Texas Pacific Group, an investment fund managing $48 billion in capital. They held 3,262,450 shares as of 31 December.

Other investors — and their shareholdings — include [as of 31 December]:

- Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers XII, LLC, 3,724,558
- Temasek Holdings (Private) Limited, 2,724,766
- Artis Capital Management, LLC, 1,877,655
- Marsico Capital Management, LLC, 1,364,478
- FMR LLC, 1,184,919
- Invesco Ltd., 424,570
- GLG Partners LP, 228,881
- Russell (Frank) Company Inc, 163,282
- BlackRock Fund Advisors, 134,035
- Mazama Capital Management, Inc, 115,291
- Kleinper Perkins’ most famous partner is Al Gore, who runs his own London-based venture capital outfit called Generation Investment Management, which he formed with the help of a former Goldman Sachs CEO. But the firm’s leading light is John Doerr, who’s also very bullish on Amyris [previously].

Temasek is a creation of the government of Singapore, Artis is a San-Francisco based and very private investment fund, Marsico is a Denver-based fund manager, and FMR is better known as Fidelity Investments.

For anyone who wants to dig deeper into Amyris SEC filings, the search begins here.

**Amyris shifts its corporate status**

Last June, shortly before its initial efforts to launch an IPO, Amyris did what many corporations do: It dropped its status as a California corporation and incorporated in Delaware.

The reasons? Well, consider this from the state’s Division of Corporations website:

> The State of Delaware is a leading domicile for U.S. and international corporations. More than 850,000 business entities have made Delaware their legal home. More than 50% of all publicly-traded companies in the United States including 63% of the Fortune 500 have chosen Delaware as their legal home. Businesses choose Delaware not for one single reason, but because we provide a complete package of incorporations services. The Delaware General Corporation Law is the most advanced and flexible business formation statute in the nation. The Delaware Court of Chancery is a unique 215 year old business court that has written most of the modern U.S. corporation case law. Delaware’s State Government is business-friendly and accessible. Our Division of Corporations operates with a state-of-the-art efficiency and our staff provides prompt, friendly and professional service to clients, attorneys, registered agents and others. These factors have all contributed to making Delaware a premier legal home to companies around the world.

Another factor: Companies that incorporate in Delaware but do no business there don’t pay any state income tax.

Under the state’s legal system, internal corporate disputes aren’t heard in the same courts non-corporate citizens use to resolve disputes, but in the chancery court, which avoids much of the hassle a company might face in, say, a California Superior Court.

Given that corporate officers are bound by the doctrine of fiduciary responsibility, it was the obvious move for a company started in Berkeley.
Amyris’ CEO, a very Melo fellow

Finally, a bit about Amyris CEO, straight from the corporate website:

*John Melo has more than 20 years of combined experience as a business leader and expert in the global fuels industry. Before joining Amyris, Mr. Melo was President of U.S. fuels operations for British Petroleum, where he successfully led programs to increase marketing volumes, reduce costs, and significantly improve financial returns. During his eight years with BP, Mr. Melo also served as Chief Information Officer of the refining and marketing segment; Senior Advisor for e-business strategy to Lord Browne, BP group chief executive; and Director of global brand development. In this last role, he helped develop the “Helios” re-branding effort. Before joining BP, Mr. Melo was with Ernst & Young and a member of the management teams for several startup companies, including Computer Aided Services and Alldata Corporation.*

[And, by the way, UC Berkeley boasts a shiny new Helios Building, housing BP’s $500 million agrofuel research partnership based at the university.]

In 2009, Melo received $408,333 in salary payments, a $200,000 bonus, and additional compensation including $145,907 for reimbursement for temporary housing and relocation expenses, $56,877 gross-up to pay associated taxes, and $18,833 of health and life insurance premiums, for a total of $829,950.

Melo also serves on the board of another renewable fuel company, Pasadena, Texas-based KiOR, for which he received $12,500 in direct compensation in 2010 plus an additional $215,042 in stock options.

According to the latest annual report, Melo manages 371 full-time employees, 272 in the United States and 99 in Brazil.

The report also adds this:

*None of our employees is represented by a labor union or is covered by a collective bargaining agreement. We have never experienced any employment-related work stoppages and consider relations with our employees to be good.*

And while we throwing in numbers, the Amyris CEO is also an active political contributor, with all of his recipients in the Democratic Party.

His contributions include:

$1,000 to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee on 30 June 2008
$2400 to Friends of Barbara Boxer on 2 November 2009
$2400 to Anna Eshoo for Congress on 91 April 2010
$2000 to ACT-BLUE on 6 July 2010
$2000 to BOXER CDP 2010 on 6 July 2010

Via here and here.

That’s it for now!

Read more of veteran journalist Richard Brenneman’s work on his blog.

Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory Names Six Finalists for Possible Second Campus Location

*From Jon R. Weiner, Manager, Communications & Media Relations, Lawrence Berkeley National Lab Wed May 11 11:22:00 -0700 2011*

Following an extensive evaluation, the University of California, manager of the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (Berkeley Lab), released a list of six potential sites for the Lab’s proposed second campus.

The University of California received more than 20 responses when a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) was released earlier this year. The proposed second campus is an effort to consolidate existing laboratory programs that are currently in leased spaces spread throughout the Bay Area, and to provide the Lab long-term cost savings.

After careful evaluation of the merits of each submittal, the sites being considered further are:

- Alameda Point, in the city of Alameda;
- Berkeley Aquatic Park West, located in West Berkeley;
- Brooklyn Basin, located in Oakland;
- Emeryville/Bekeley, (includes properties currently occupied by the Lab in Emeryville and West Berkeley);
- Golden Gate Fields, spanning the cities of Berkeley and Albany;
- Richmond Field Station, a site currently owned by the University of California. “We had tremendous response to our call for qualifications,” says Berkeley Lab Director Paul Alivisatos. “We really want to thank all the cities and developers that presented their ideas. The large number of visionary responses created by so many communities in the East Bay is an impressive reminder of the value that our region places on science in service of society. And now that we have identified our top candidates, we look forward to working with them as we move closer to selecting a preferred site.”

Site finalists were chosen based on their ability to meet multiple criteria in the RFQ including a location within 20 to 25 minutes of the original campus, land capacity to accommodate potential future growth, and easy access to public transportation and other amenities.

Most of Berkeley Lab’s 4,200 employees work at its main site, but about 20 percent of them are dispersed in leased facilities around the East Bay, including at the Joint BioEnergy Institute (JBEI) in Emeryville, the Joint Genome Institute (JGI) in Walnut Creek, and the Lab’s life science facilities in Berkeley.

If this project were to move forward, a second campus would provide substantial scientific benefits by allowing researchers, presently scattered throughout the various off-lab sites, to interact more directly with each other and with faculty and students from throughout the UC system.

While the University’s original intent was to identify a preferred site by this summer, it became clear during this very competitive process that the next steps of due diligence, site inspections, and negotiations will extend that timeline.

A decision on a preferred site will likely occur in late November with occupancy scheduled for mid-2016.

# # #

Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory addresses the world’s most urgent scientific challenges by advancing sustainable energy, protecting human health, creating new materials, and revealing the origin and fate of the universe. Founded in 1931, Berkeley Lab’s scientific expertise has been recognized with 12 Nobel prizes. The University of California manages Berkeley Lab for the U.S. Department of Energy’s Office of Science. For more, visit www.lbl.gov.
The landmark Sill Grocery, currently housing Ace Hardware, would have a five story residential addition placed on top as part of the proposed Acheson Commons project. The Acheson Building, at left, would be converted to apartments.

Both of these brown shingle apartment buildings at Walnut and Berkeley Way would be removed as part of the Acheson Commons project.

A view of the proposed development with the Acheson Building at left and Ace Hardware at center, topped by a five-story addition.

The entire development in an aerial view, from the southeast, with Shattuck Avenue at far left and Walnut Street at far right.

Architect Kirk Peterson, right, points out a design detail to Commissioner Christopher Linvill. The head in the background was left over from a North Berkeley Senior Center Cinco de Mayo celebration.

Discussion of the large Acheson Commons housing development proposed for Downtown Berkeley occupied the attention of Berkeley’s Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) at their May 5, 2011 regular meeting.

The proposed project, which occupies most of the rectangular block bordered by University Avenue, Shattuck, Berkeley Way, and Walnut Street, includes the removal of two older brown shingle apartment buildings, additions on top of two existing landmark buildings and a third, undesignated, older structure, conversion of the landmark Acheson Physician’s Building to housing, and one entirely new construction structure.

The development would also wrap around three sides of the five story Bachenheimer Building, which Peterson designed several years ago and which Equity Residential owns.

Dustin Smith from Equity Residential, the project owners and developers, said that the firm was a “SP 500 Company”, owning approximately 500 properties nationwide, including eight in Berkeley. Their properties are rented “to more than 200,000 residents”.

The Berkeley project would construct just over 200 new residential units as a “high density, urban infill project.” “We have incorporated sustainable green practices into our design”, Smith said and “we believe this project will be a catalyst for new money and development in downtown Berkeley.”

“We will be providing a wide variety of housing sizes and styles to appeal to new residents”, he added and “we will open up our project to both union and non-union contractors and subs” to bid on the construction work.

The project would displace all of the existing businesses along the north frontage of University Avenue between Shattuck and Walnut since each building would require major construction. However, Smith said, Equity Residential would “try to keep Ace (Hardware) in operation during construction,” possibly by moving them to the ground floor of the Acheson Building next door to the west. Representatives of at least three of the businesses, including Ace, were at the hearing, listening to the presentation.

Kirk Peterson, the project architect, presented a series of drawings and plans showing the current design concepts. The Commission saw an earlier iteration of the design in 2010.

“It grew a story” since then, said Peterson, noting that most of the structures are now proposed to be six, not five, stories tall. “We’ll be building with new building codes allowing five stories of wood frame development” over a commercial ground floor.

“The character and fabric of the buildings will look very much like Berkeley”, Peterson said. There will be no underground parking, but some ground level parking will be provided in the all new construction building at Berkeley Way and Walnut Street.

The project will not provide any new public off-street open space, but in the middle of the complex “there’s room to have some big trees”, Peterson said. Roof decks will also be provided, and the project will work with the City of Berkeley’s SOSIP (Down-town streetscape) guidelines which call for narrowing University Avenue to one traffic lane in each direction between Shattuck and Oxford, and providing wider landscape strips on either side and in the center of the street.

“There’s much new sidewalk and room for trees” on the street, Peterson said, adding that John Roberts is the landscape architect for the project.

Peterson said the landmark Acheson building—a four story buff brick structure that housed commercial spaces on the
ground floor, and professional offices upstairs—would be renovated on the exterior, but “the interior goes away” as it is altered to apartments. “The building, 103 years old, is “in a very good state of preservation” he noted. It has “apparently, the oldest operating elevator on the West Coast” which will be retained, but upgraded.

New five story residential structures will rise above the two one-story commercial buildings west of the Acheson Building, down to the University Avenue / Shattuck Avenue corner. The existing commercial facades will be retained and restored, and the new structure will be set back five feet behind the parapets of the old buildings. Although the new structure will be one unified building on the interior, on the outside facing University Avenue it will have two different architectural characters and different upper floor massing, aligned with the historic structures at ground level.

Along Walnut Street the Ace Hardware building (the landmark Sill Grocery) will have a five story residential addition on top, set five feet back from the parapet along University Avenue but rising straight up from the existing wall along Walnut Street. This will connect to a new six story building on the parking lot behind and the site of the two brown shingle houses. The houses Smith described as “two cottages of Walnut”. He said “they are not landmarked and have no context.” “In the plan the two houses would live happily ever after somewhere else, but that’s not part of our design”, said Peterson. (Note: the two buildings are multi-unit apartment structures, not ‘cottages’. They retain their context adjacent to the Sill Grocery and across the street from two other early 20th century wooden residential buildings forming a cluster at the intersection of Walnut and Berkeley Way. This group has been in place, largely unchanged on the exterior, for a century.)

The design details of the project are “very much a work in progress” Peterson emphasized. “Our intent is not to fool people into thinking they’re old buildings”, but to use traditional details, design, and massing to harmonize with older structures. Some people call this “false historicism”, Peterson said, but in his view, “there’s not false historicism. There’s bad historicism, and there’s good historicism.”

Peterson, who is known for his Berkeley and Oakland buildings that are sympathetic to their neighbors and incorporate traditional design elements, often with a Gothic, Mediterranean, or Renaissance feel, noted that famed architects like H. H. Richardson in Chicago and Berkeley’s Bernard Maybeck drew on the past for design details and character of their buildings.

“The Bachenheimer Building is a good example of what you’re trying to say”, Chair Gary Parsons interjected.

“I don’t see this as false historicism myself, and I appreciate your careful attention to detail”, said Commissioner Carrie Olson. “You’ll have an easier time of it than if we were trying to deal with someone trying to do something very different.”

Olson did express concern about the limited setbacks of some of the new residential additions. “I asked that it take a bigger step back” above the Ace Hardware structure, she said. “That’s not what we’re seeing.”

The further back it goes, the more it’s like facadeism”, argued Peterson, but other Commissioners who spoke generally agreed with Olson regarding the Ace / Sill building. “Those buildings must be set back more, especially on the Ace building”, said Commissioner Austene Hall. The building is “an important little landmark”, and “I think you can do something far more creative.”

Commissioner Steve Winkel suggested that the right setback would align the new construction upper south façade with the end of the Ace display windows on Walnut Street, and “the top of that building needs some work.”

“I like where this is going a lot”, Winkel said. He suggested that Peterson work with the City to figure out whether there is any way to include bay windows on the Walnut Street elevation of the new residential structures to help vary and articulate that façade.

Winkel and Peterson briefly discussed what the skin of a building of this sort would have looked like if had been built in the early 20th century. Brick or stone, they agreed, and Winkel expressed concern about large areas of stucco façade.

“A lot of my favorite buildings are Spanish Colonial”, Peterson said. They have “a lot of plainness, but then some really great richness” around doors, windows, and in other selected spots. “The materials are going to be critical”, Winkel agreed.

Commissioner Hall expressed concern about a five foot setback above and behind historic facades could set a precedent that a poor architect could misuse on other downtown projects. “Some crappy design on top of a historic building at five feet becomes the standard, and that’s a problem.”

The Commission briefly discussed how the large and complex project is going to be reviewed by the City. The Zoning Adjustments Board is having a “preview” of the project at its meeting this week (May 12), while the City’s Design Review Committee gets a look next week.

“Where is it going to begin and end?” Commissioner Steve Winkel wondered. “It’s going to have to be a joint design review”, since the historic buildings come under the purview of the Landmarks Commission, while all-new structures would generally be reviewed by the separate Design Review Commission.

“That will be fun”, said Peterson.

“Design Review is hoping that the LPC will provide some direction”, said Commission Secretary Jay Claiborne. “I think this Commission (LPC) had to take the lead on doing the alternation permits on the landmark properties”, said Commissioner Olson, who also sits on Design Review. “I would like to know where the parcels stop and start.”

“I think this does take a delicate dance”, she added. “The feedback loop should be whole” between Commissions.

In response to a question about the project timing, Smith said “we’re hoping to get through this phase of review by about this time next year.”

Olson suggested that a subcommittee might be set up, inviting the Design Review Committee to add members to make it a joint body. Commissioners Winkel, Hall, and Olson agreed to serve on a subcommittee.

Eight regular members of the Commission were present at the meeting. Commissioner Miriam Ng did not attend the meeting.

1755 Le Roy / Tellefsen Hall

In other business, the Commission held a public hearing and discussion on proposed landscape changes to 1755 Le Roy Avenue, the landmarked Volney Moody House, originally known as “Weltevreden.” The iconic clinker brick clad 19th century house followed Arts and Crafts and Hillside Club movement ideals by oriented the house to Strawberry Creek to the south.

The property, with a large garden, is now used as Tellefsen Hall, a private residence housing about 40 members of the California Marching Band. The owner applicants sent their landscape designers, Masalo Kamelani and Yoonju Chang of MaYo Landscape Architects, to make a presentation to the Commission. No one from Tellefsen Hall testified.

The project proposes to alter and refurbish
much of the garden area south of the creek and bridge, reconfiguring some terraces into a half-circle patio with central fire pit, curved seating walls, and some new plantings. A concrete patio would be removed and replaced with unit pavers.

Two neighbors, Gladys and Clifford Block, who live next to the garden area, spoke at the public hearing, expressing concern that the changes would increase late night outdoor partying activity and noise.

“Our bedroom is literally five feet from the area they will start redesigning”, said Gladys Block. “That will encourage the students to be out there later at night”, using the fire pit and seating areas. Two days ago, she said, Tellefsen Hall held a party and “no one left their deck until 2:15 in the morning.”

“There is nothing I can do to keep them inside the house after 11 o’clock”, she added. “We can hear their conversations.” While she did not object to periodic parties, she said, “I really object to having our nights even more often kept awake.”

“We are nice kids, we’ve talked to them”, added Clifford Block, noting he and his wife have lived there for 20 years. But they worry about both the fire pit and the increased likelihood of more parties and noise next to their home, he said.

“I hear the concerns from the neighbors”, said Kamelani from the design team. “That is always a problem, but we would like to focus on the design issues.”

“We love this property”, she said. The landscape elements “are kind of neglected and falling apart.” “We were hired to improve the existing conditions.”

They want to improve runoff to the creek, she said, and will try not to have any bright lights in the landscaping. She also responded to a written letter in the Commission packet from another neighbor, Jim Sharp, asking that native plant species be used in the landscaping. “Our intention is to select plants that do well in Berkeley”, she said. “Well definitely revisit the planting plan; we’ll work with a native plant specialist.”

Commission discussion focused in part on the fire pit. Most Commissioners were critical or skeptical, worried about the danger of fire spreading, and echoing the neighbor concerns that an outdoor fire would encourage residents to party around it late into the night.

“It’s not a very Berkeley thing now”, to have fire pits, said Commissioner Olson.

“We wanted to have some central feature” of the patio said Chang, but perhaps they could substitute “something more temporary, moveable.”

Chair Parsons suggested that instead of a fire pit, a water feature could be the focus of the patio. “The fire pit is something that no one up here (at the Commission table) seems to love”, said Parsons, predicting the fire pit “is not going to happen.”

Other concerns from Commissioners included the possible loss of rustic rock walls and historic brick work, and skepticism about using concrete unit pavers for new hardscape. Stone walls are “the essential element of beauty in that garden”, said Commissioner Schwartz. He suggested that any new stairs be of stone, not materials “more appropriate to Walnut Creek.”

“We’re very much in agreement with you” said Kamelani, while adding “right now the outdoor space doesn’t adequately support the function” and that the students “want lounging space (outdoors) during the day time.”

“There’s a lot to talk about here”, said Chair Persons. He told the neighbors it was probably not in the purview of the Commission to deal with the issue of late night partying, “but we are held responsible to how the new design relates to the historic resource.”

Commissioners also expressed concern about a parking lot west of the house, and encouraged the designers and owners to extend their planning to improve its condition. “It would be really nice if they could do a hard landscape that would make it beautiful”, Olson said.

The designers said that the project has to be funded incrementally, but they would talk to the owners about including phased improvements to the parking lot. Commissioners also said they were concerned about a student residence which has natural turnover and where in four or five years all the current students are gone, and no one may feel responsible for carrying out the plans or maintaining the new landscape as it was approved.

The Commission did not take action on any of the proposed design plans but instead appointed a subcommittee of Schwartz, Winkel, Olson and Hall to visit the property. Subcommittees are a typical LPC practice to allow a group of Commissioners to discuss projects in great detail and bring a consoli-dated set of recommendations back to the Commission.

**Berkeley Rose Garden**

The Commission also briefly heard from staff on an issue of views at the landmark Berkeley Rose Garden. Initially, the City was going to consider removal of an oak tree at the garden to open up historic views of the Bay, but, said Claiborne, “the person at Parks and Rec who raised that issue has left the city. They have resolved the issue by doing pruning” of the oak. “It’s now a non-issue. But it’s still worth going (to the Rose Garden) because the roses are in bloom.”

Some Commissioners disagreed on the tree issue, saying that the views of the Bay had been steadily constricted over the years by trees growing taller around the edges and beyond the Garden. Commissioner Schwartz said there used to be good views, but “now you see trees.” “The views are an essential element” of the landscape. “The views are incredible. It’s a rose garden, not a tree farm.”

“I think the City kowtows too much to people who are tree lovers”, said Schwartz. “there are plenty of trees in Codornices Park, due east of the Rose Garden.”

“They’re going to do pruning, we’ll see if it is sufficient” said Claiborne.

**McDuffie Estate**

22 Roble Road, the landmarked Duncan and Jean McDuffie estate, was also on the agenda as a continued public hearing. No representatives of the owners—who are planning a series of remodels—were present, and Commission Secretary Jay Claiborne said that the owners had asked to continue the item again until June. In March the Commission landmarked the property, and in April it began reviewing the proposed alterations.

One individual, Leila Monscharsh, testified during the public hearing. She grew up in the house, and had organized a petition drive to landmark the structure. The Commission ended up merging her landmark application with that of the current owners when making the designation.

Monscharsh thanked the Commissioners for their volunteer time, particularly for making trips to the McDuffie property to see the site conditions and proposed changes in person. They came up to her neighborhood, she said, and “the least I can do is come down and thank you.”

“I think the project is going to be fine”, she added. “What you do here is you don’t kill projects, you make projects better.”

“Just looking at projects and saying, they’re all great, is not what this Commission is about”, she added, thanking them again for their volunteer time and careful attention to the property.

“That’s really, really a nice thing to say”, said Chair Gary Parsons.
Berkeley Seeks Buyers for Occupied Public Housing Units (Partisan Position)

By Lynda Carson
Tue May 10 08:23:00 -0700 2011

A plan opposed by low-income public housing residents of Berkeley to privatize and sell their longtime public housing units, has moved forward with the latest effort to find a buyer for Berkeley’s 75 public housing units.

On May 2, 2011, the Berkeley Housing Authority (BHA) released a Request For Proposals (RFP), in an effort to find one or more so-called non profit housing developers, or for profit developers willing to buy Berkeley’s mostly occupied 75 - three and four bedroom townhouse units, located throughout the City of Berkeley, on 15 parcels. Developers can obtain the RFP at the BHA’s Administrative Office, or through Tia Ingram, BHA’s Executive Director.

In an effort to privatize and sell its public housing units, the BHA is seeking statements of qualification and fee proposals from developers for the acquisition, rehabilitation and operation of its 75 public housing units. The effort will displace Berkeley’s poor public housing residents from their housing.

Tenant protections exist, and Berkeley’s Just Cause rent laws prohibit landlords from evicting renters from their housing when a property is being sold. But in defiance of Berkeley’s Just Cause rental protections the BHA is moving forward to pressure and displace Berkeley’s poor low-income mostly African-American public housing residents from their longtime public housing, in the effort to privatize and sell the 75 public housing units to one or more non profit housing developers.

Documents reveal that the BHA have already been involved in discussions with local non profit developers including Ryan Chao, Executive Director of Satellite Housing, Dan Sawislak, Executive Director of Resources for Community Development, Susan Friedland, Executive Director of Affordable Housing Associates, and Jack Gardner, President and CEO, of the John Stewart Company.

Submissions to the RFP are due no later than 3:00 PM July 11, 2011, and the selection of the highest ranked respondent is scheduled to occur on Aug. 1, 2011.

Though established during 1966, in recent years the BHA has spent numerous years listed as a Troubled agency, owns and manages 75 public housing units, administers around 1,939 subsidized housing Section 8 voucher contracts, and filed papers with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on Dec. 29, 2009, to dispose of its public housing units. The approval by HUD to dispose of and sell Berkeley’s 75 public housing units occurred on Dec. 22, 2010.

Public housing provides housing for those with a low income or no income at all, and provides housing for families, the working poor, the elderly and disabled.

In comparison, non profit housing developers require minimum incomes for people to reside in their so-called affordable housing properties, and generally discriminate against poor people that have no income at all.

Based upon information provided by the BHA around 2009, nearly 72.9% of its public housing tenants earn less than $30,000 annually. Additionally, 86.5% of the residents in the BHA’s public housing program identify themselves as Black / African-American, 11.2% as white, and 2.2% as Asian, and that the BHA only makes around $607 per month from federal subsidies, including rent collected from the tenants for a three to four bedroom public housing unit.

The BHA wants to privatize and sell its 75 public housing units to one or more non profit housing developers that are willing to kick-back money to the BHA and the City of Berkeley, in a longtime partnership, in the effort to turn Berkeley’s public housing units into a money making venture.

Berkeley’s poor face displacement from their longtime public housing units due to the various schemes the BHA is willing to entertain, including proposals from developers/owners that propose some form of resale, redevelopment or reuse of the individual properties, currently being occupied by Berkeley’s poor public housing residents.

Lynda Carson may be reached at tenantsrule@yahoo.com

Top Graduating Senior a Rags-to-Academic-Riches Story

From Yasmin Anwar, U.C. Berkeley
Tue May 10 11:03:00 -0700 2011

The life of über-scholar and cellist Aaron Benavidez, just named the top graduating senior at the University of California, Berkeley, is nothing short of dramatic – from his impoverished and turbulent childhood in California’s Central Valley, to playing the cello in Europe’s elite concert halls, to finding his “Ithaca” in the field of sociology.

This Saturday, Benavidez, the youngest son of working class Latinos in Stockton, Calif., will accept the University Medal for his scholarship, public service and humanity at Commencement 2011. Before a crowd of 12,000 people at Edwards Track Stadium, he will deliver a speech that is sure to convey how fortunate he feels.

“Only at Berkeley could someone who was hungry for more, someone who wanted to experience a challenge, someone, like me, succeed,” said Benavidez, a double major in sociology and rhetoric whose erudition since transferring to UC Berkeley from Sacramento City College in 2008 earned him a near-perfect GPA of 3.98, including 11 A-pluses.

At 31, Benavidez’ fresh, unlined face and direct gaze behind dark-framed glasses belie his age and the obstacles he’s had to overcome. Given the hand he was dealt, it’s a miracle he made it to UC Berkeley at all.

“Aaron is simply not supposed to be at Berkeley,” wrote UC Berkeley sociology professor Loїc Wacquant in his letter recommending Benavidez for the University Medal. “He is not supposed to have garnered straight A’s and A-pluses in all his classes; he is not supposed to have mastered two disciplines, sociology and rhetoric; he is not supposed to have developed his own scholarship and to have grown into a Renaissance young man who weds scholarly brilliance and artistic excellence with personal generosity and social commitment.”

Indeed, at UC Berkeley, Benavidez has garnered an impressive legacy as founder of Eleven: The Undergraduate Journal of Sociology, for which he served as editor-in-chief, and of the UC Berkeley Sociological Research Symposium, for which he recently won an OSKIs Student Leadership Award.

He worked as a research intern at the Center for Urban Ethnography, as president of the Berkeley Undergraduate Sociology Association and as academic chair of the Alpha Kappa Delta Sociology Honors Society, and taught a DeCal course, “Violence: From Visible to (In)Visible.”

He said sociology has given him the language to translate and make sense of his life.

The son of a Mexican-American electrician and a Panamanian house cleaner and caregiver, Benavidez was born in Los Angeles in 1980, the youngest of two girls and two boys. As a child, poverty and bouts of violence and alcoholism plagued his household. When his parents separated when he was 5, his mother moved her brood into a
modest apartment in Stockton.

His parents reunited when he was 7, and the family moved into a house in a working-class neighborhood in Stockton. He took up the cello, drawn to the power and emotions he could project through the large, bowed, four-string instrument.

“I could be anybody,” he said. “The cello allowed me to enact and embody the different variations that I was becoming.”

His father, a Teamsters union organizer, instilled in his son the moxy to fight against socio-economic and racial inequities. “If something concerned me in high school, I would start a petition,” he said.

But his parents’ fears that academia would wrench their son from his humble roots meant they kept him from enrolling in honors courses and taking his SAT exams, Benavidez said.

In spite of these hurdles, Benavidez excelled, winning essay competitions and other accolades. But he was not a quiet, nose-in-a-book child. In fact, he was so rambunctious on the school bus one day that the driver ordered him off, with his cello, in an isolated area near Highway 99. “It’s just me and you,” Benavidez told his cello as they set off for the long journey home.

At 17, he applied to UC Berkeley, submitting everything but his SAT scores, which he could not provide because he had not taken the exam. At the time, his parents had not seen the point in him taking the exam, and so had not taken him to the testing site.

By the time a letter from UC Berkeley arrived accepting him on condition that he complete 60 community college units, Benavidez had left home, dropped out of high school and moved to Sacramento, where he supported himself by working in a music store and teaching cello.

After ekining out a living, he auditioned informally for the UC Davis Symphony Orchestra. His distinctive talent earned him the position of principal cellist and he went on to perform at such prestigious venues as The Sorbonne in Paris and the Esterhazy Palace in Austria.

Despite the prestige, travel and opportunity to perfect his art, it was a period of intense solitude and introspection for Be

navidez. “I was giving so much of myself to the music. I wanted to retreat,” he said.

At times, he tried leaving his cello in the unlocked trunk of his car, or in the lobby of his apartment building, hoping someone would steal it. But no one ever did.

By 2005, he had quit the UC Davis Symphony, packed away his cello and enrolled at Sacramento City College, segueing from professional musician to starving student. Even though he was eligible for financial aid, he refused it on the grounds that “I was on a journey I didn’t want taxpayers to pay for.”

He earned no less than 10 associate’s degrees in subjects ranging from English to history to international studies.

When he arrived at UC Berkeley in 2008 as a 28-year-old transfer student with financial aid and student loans, he finally felt secure: “I had money for the first time. I could buy books, food. It made me appreciate Berkeley, made me want to spend all my time doing work.”

And work he did, embarking on two majors and finding his niche. It was in his sociology honors thesis program that Benavidez became interested in violence in the lives of transgender women. His research led him to coin the term “quotidian violence” — everyday hostility and ongoing abuse that cause anxiety and a reduced quality of life.

Almost every Saturday afternoon, he volunteered at TRANS: THRIVE, a drop-in center in San Francisco’s Tenderloin district for transgender people, where he would chat with them, wash dishes and organize a closet of clothes.

“I saw something of myself in their struggle to come to terms with violence,” Benavidez wrote in his application essay for the University Medal. “We were together in translating tragedy.”

This past winter, he traveled to Johannesburg, South Africa, conducting more than 90 interviews at Nelson Mandela Bridge, Constitution Hill and the Apartheid Museum. His findings suggest that South Africa’s new national identity is being packaged more for a global audience than for people who reside within the country.

This June, Benavidez will assist University of Pennsylvania anthropologist Philippe Bourgois with his research. Next, he will apply to Ph.D. programs as one of 25 top minority students selected to attend a graduate school application “boot camp” at the Institute for the Recruitment of Teachers program at Andover Academy in Boston.

After that, he will return to UC Berkeley to work on a research project about Guatanamo Bay Detention Camp with rhetoric professor Ramona Naddaff. He hopes to begin a doctoral program in sociology in fall 2012, but he said it’s too early to say where.

But before he’s swept up in his next scholarly adventure, Benavidez is stopping to reflect on why UC Berkeley was the right place for him at the right time.

“Berkeley is a place to which you have to come knowing yourself,” he said. “By the time I arrived, I knew what I wanted to do and the courses I wanted to take. In a way, it was like magic.”

U.C.’S Godzilla Crane—a Looming Presence over Teley—Pokes Its Nose Over Saturday’s ASUC Hip-hop Fest in People’s Park

By Ted Friedman

Wed May 11 09:21:00 -0700 2011

This university crane—a city block in length—swiveled its way into People’s Park for Saturday’s ASUC’s annual hip-hop event.

Perhaps the crane wanted to check out the staccato enunciation of Saturday’s hip-hoppers, who seem capable of spitting out the entire works of Alfred Lord Tennyson in three minutes.

The Godzilla crane, which has swiveled its way over Telegraph for three weeks, appearing over the Cafe Mediterraneum as well as Rasputin’s, is at work on a six-story student dormitory, which will house 418 when it is completed in the fall of 2012, according to a university spokesman.

The complex will feature interior plazas and a public access pathway for pedestrians addicted to cutting across the former university parking lot that was torn down to make a paradise out of a parking lot.

There is no intended parking, according to the spokesman. Those registering for the new dorm must not have cars, according to the university.

Some park regulars, who see the crane as an interloper, or worse, believe the crane portends the university’s intentions to re-
take the park. The university owns the land, but not the park, according to many park users.

Saturday’s ASUC hip-hop event, in its sixteenth year, was closely watched by five UCPD patrolmen. Three of their heads appear in the lower right hand corner of the accompanying photo.

University police have in past years had trouble with hip-hop riots, although not in the park, and are being on the look-out for trouble. Some attendees, said violence was far from their minds.

On behalf of park neighbors, police also monitored decibel ratings. More than three hundred students attended the event which, according to police, ended peacefully at five p.m. The event got off to a late start in the afternoon but at its peak attracted more than 300 students.

Ted Friedman is keeping his eye on the Southside Godzilla just to make sure it doesn’t get out of line.

Another Rate Hike for East Bay MUD -- What Are the Options? (News Analysis)

By Stuart Flashman
Wed May 11 11:30:00 -0700 2011

Once again, East Bay MUD’s more than two million water customers in the East Bay are facing a rate hike. This time, the staff proposal is for a six percent across-the-board increase in water rates. EBMUD’s explanation is, essentially, that we customers have been too good at saving water. As a consequence, the water district has been getting less revenue, while its costs haven’t decreased accordingly.

There’s some truth to this explanation. Many of EBMUD’s costs are relatively independent of water use. For example, the costs for maintaining EBMUD’s reservoirs, treatment plants, and pipelines stay pretty much the same regardless of whether we’re using water like crazy or letting our lawns turn brown. Also, the interest costs on EBMUD’s capital improvement bonds don’t change regardless of water use, nor does the cost of salaries and benefits for EBMUD’s employees. Some of EBMUD’s costs do reflect water use; for example electrical costs for pumping and the costs for chemicals used in treatment, but overall, much of EBMUD’s costs are fixed. Since East Bay MUD’s charges for water on a per-gallon basis, and especially because EBMUD’s “inclined block” rate structure means that when you use more water, your per-gallon rate goes up, when people save water, their water bills go down. That’s good for the homeowner, but bad for EBMUD’s finances.

That being said, there are many possible ways to deal with this beyond the across-the-board increase EBMUD staff has proposed. Here are a few of them:

1) Shift more of the bill to a fixed-cost element (i.e., a monthly fixed administrative fee) -- essentially a component reflecting fixed costs. That would give more income stability, but would decrease the effectiveness of the pricing message in EBMUD’s current rate structure. In essence, it would tell customers, “Use as much water as you want. We don’t care.”

2) Do what staff proposes -- raise all rates by a fixed percentage across the board. This is a relatively regressive approach, because everyone gets penalized equally regardless of water use, and there’s no way to avoid an increase.

3) Raise rates, but with a higher rate of increase for the upper tiers of the rate structure. This would be a more progressive approach. It would shift the extra cost onto the heavier users. The risk/downside (as it were) is that the higher rates would send a stronger message to high-water-users to decrease their use. To the extent they did, the revenue problem could come back or even get worse. On the other hand, however, if usage decreased significantly over the long-term, capital improvement costs and associated bond interest charges would also decrease, decreasing the revenue need.

4) Shift the rate tiers lower, so that maintaining the same water use would put you into a higher tier and increase your water bill. If you wanted to keep your bill low, you’d need to find ways to save even more water. This would have the advantage of providing a continuing incentive for customers to shift towards higher and higher conservation. It would also give customers a way to avoid an increased water bill. One way to adjust the tiers and stabilize income would be to base them on district-wide average use -- e.g., the lowest tier could be for use less than 50% of average use; the next tier, from 50% to 150% of average use; and the third, and highest tier, more than 150% of average use. (EBMUD could also add back the fourth “water waster” tier, starting at, say twice the average use. That tier was eliminated after the last drought ended. It was VERY unpopular East of the Hills, and in Piedmont.) If average use decreased, the tiers would “float” downward. This would guarantee a stable income flow, but would make the tiers less stable, and some people might find it demoralizing -- kind of like running on a treadmill; you keep going faster, but you don’t gain any ground.

Each of these approaches has its pluses and minuses, but each sends a message to customers that goes beyond EBMUD’s current mantra of, “We need more money.”

Stuart Flashman is an Oakland attorney specializing in environmental, land use, and natural resources law. He was an East Bay MUD board member from 1990 to 1994, and served as board president in 1994.

Detained Hikers to Stand Trial in Iran

By Jeff Shuttleworth, BCN
Wed May 11 16:36:00 -0700 2011

Two University of California at Berkeley graduates who have been detained in Iran for more than 21 months will stand trial today on espionage charges, according to their families.

Josh Fattal and Shane Bauer, both 28, along with Sarah Shourd, 32, were arrested on July 31, 2009, while hiking in Iraq’s Kurdistan region near the Iran border.

Shourd, who was released last September, and the families of Fattal and Bauer say the hikers were detained after they accidentally crossed an unmarked border into Iran.

But Iran has accused them of espionage.

Shourd, who also graduated from UC Berkeley, announced last week that she is suffering from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder brought on by her imprisonment and won’t return to Tehran for the trial with Bauer, who is her fiancé, and Fattal.

Shourd said in a statement that Bauer and Fattal “have to live every second of every day with the fear and uncertainty that comes from not knowing why they are being held, what is going to happen to them or how their families are coping.”

Shourd said, “We are not spies and Iran knows it. Shane and Josh should be free to resume their lives and I hope the court will release because they have done nothing wrong.”

Shourd’s mother, Nora Shourd, who lives in Oakland, said in a recent email message that the espionage charges against the hikers are “baseless.”

She said Bauer and Fattal “have now spent more than 21 months in prison in Iran for no reason, virtually cut off from our families and with no access to their lawyer.”

Shourd said, “We are sick with worry about Shane and Josh and the damage their uncertainty and isolation is doing to their
ment and physical health.”

She added, “This nightmare is also taking a terrible toll on our families. Many of us have fallen ill, or had to give up jobs, and faced other troubles because of what Iran is doing.”

The families of Bauer and Fattal said in a statement on Monday that, “Shane and Josh should not be standing trial but we trust they will be given the chance to reaffirm their innocence, as they did at a previous hearing on Feb. 6, and that the Iranian judiciary will recognize at long last that the only outcome is their immediate release.”

The families said, “The world will be watching and praying that the court will act in the spirit of justice and humanity that Shane and Josh so clearly deserve.”

**Construction Starts on Two Berkeley Libraries**

*From the Berkeley Public Library*

**Tue May 10 17:03:00 -0700 2011**

Claremont Branch Library renovation and construction is now underway. Fine Line Construction was awarded a $3,300,000 contract for the branch improvements, which began May 3, 2011. Construction is slated to last 9 to 12 months and branch reopening is anticipated for first quarter 2012.

North Branch Library renovation and construction is expected to begin on May 17, 2011 with construction projected to last 12 to 16 months and branch reopening expected in the second quarter of 2012. A $4,560,000 construction contract was awarded to BHM Construction for the branch improvements.

Both branches will be brought up to current code, made seismically safe and fully accessible and are expected to meet the City of Berkeley’s goal for LEED Silver Certified library facilities.

Weekly construction and general branch improvement project updates for both branches will be posted to: [http://www.berkeleypubliclibrary.org/branchimprovements](http://www.berkeleypubliclibrary.org/branchimprovements)

The Berkeley Public Library thanks the community for its continued support of Measure FF and patience while we work to make these vital and wonderful improvements to your neighborhood branch libraries!

**Thinking Outside the Berk: When You Can’t Get What You Want in Berkeley (First Person)**

*By Ted Friedman*

**Wed May 11 09:03:00 -0700 2011**

On my way to not-so-near-by El Cerrito’s Guitar Center on San Pablo Avenue to update my reporting gear, I stopped off at Barnes & Noble last week.

The B&N visit was a pit (restroom) stop. I never felt that El Cerrito’s B&N compared well as a bookstore to the B&N, Berkeley. Along with more books our B&N had Berkeley artifacts such as street people enjoying the wrought iron bench and in-store fountain, and, of course, its restroom.

Anyone who has read my piece, “You Can’t Always Get What You Want,” (Planet: Apr. 16, 2009), may recall that I have written more than one piece lamenting the loss of many of Berkeley’s book, magazine and video stores.

El Cerrito’s B&N magazine section aroused my deepest jealousy. Even if you patched together every meager magazine rack in Berkeley, such as Pegasus, or ASUC bookstore’s, you could not match the magazine cornucopia I found in El Cerrito. Lamentably, lost-Cody’s offered a major mag stash next to a panoramic view of Telegraph.

El Cerrito has never been more than a bedroom community, but attracts Berkeley musicologists with Arhoolie Records and the Guitar Center. Even so, there is no there in El Cerrito. Unlike Albany, which has a great shopping street (Solano), El Cerrito must gather at its fancy strip mall. But not many had gathered there.

As I emerged from the El Cerrito B&N, and crossed the mall access street to a CVS drugstore for a toothbrush, I noticed the forlorn look of the setting.

Faux-fancy stores seemed misplaced beneath a hazy view of distant hillside homes, but offer refuge from busy San Pablo Avenue and nearby BART station.

As I emerged, smiling, from the gargantuan drugstore, I reflected on my conversation with the checkout clerk, an affable senior. I had told him I was finding my time in E.C. a pleasant diversion from my Southside Berkeley crime scene.

“Next time, you need to relax,” he said, “come back to El Cerrito.” Is the Chamber of Commerce paying this guy?

I emailed my brain. Ted to brain: return to El Cerrito.

I was in E.C. for more than a tooth brush. The digital field recorder I thought I needed seemed—at least on-line—unavailable in Berkeley.

Berkeley, with its beguiling allure—head shops, tattoo parlors, and colorful poseurs—was on my mind even as I posed in E.C. as a tourist.

The Guitar Center, my destination, occupies a big chunk of a long block not far from B&N. The El Cerrito music supplies store, part of a national chain, attracts local musicians whom I overheard discussing their gigs and their equipment problems. The outside of the store displays images of famous recording artists, some of whom frequented the store.

You can get what you want in separate Berkeley music stores, although each one might fit in a small section of this music-blaring aircraft hangar.

Although I was there for a recorder, I envied an electronic keyboard which offered to show you Beethoven’s keyboard strokes on a tiny screen.

And oh yes, I did buy the recorder. The next time I shove it in the face of a source, he will think, “what a pro.” But then, he’ll clam up. I’ll use it for sit-down interviews.

To be fair, I later called around to Berkeley music stores for a field recorder in Berkeley. If had been willing to pay three times more, I could choose from four. But, as I wrote for the Planet two years ago about the lack of goods in the wake of the loss of many of Berkeley’s key businesses:

“Can’t always get what you want, but if you try real hard, you might get what you need.”

I got what I needed in El Cerrito. Now why do I feel guilty?

Ted Friedman is safely back in the hood.

**What Councilmembers Said At “New Libraries Now” Rally**

*By Steven Finacom*

**Wed May 11 08:53:00 -0700 2011**

![Steven Finacom](image)
On April 26, 2011, as I reported in the April 27th Planet, a group of about 60-70 supporters of demolishing and rebuilding the South and West branches of the Berkeley Public Library held a rally on the steps of City Hall during a Council meeting.

This was under the auspices of a group calling itself “New Libraries Now”. Dave Snyder from the Berkeley Public Library Foundation e-mailed the event and introduced speakers, including three members of the Berkeley City Council. All three, along with a fourth member, Darryl Moore, stood at the top of the City Hall steps by the podium holding signs supporting the rally and calling for “new libraries now.”

Councilmembers Linda Maio, Max Anderson, and Laurie Capitelli spoke at the rally.

Some of their quotations have been mis-reported in other media. I also quoted some of their remarks in my article, but not their complete statements. Since then, a number of people have asked me if there is a complete transcript of their remarks.

Below is a transcript [made from a recording.]. There was an individual heckler yelling about the City budget during the rally, so at a few points the yelling or crowd applause made words or phrases in the Councilmember comments inaudible. Those points are indicated. Otherwise, this is a transcript of their full remarks.

DAVE SNYDER: “We want to take the opportunity to have some of our City Councilmembers make their comments so, please, Councilmember Susan Wengraf...” (turning to Councilmember Linda Maio. Maio takes the microphone).

LINDA MAIO:

“Thats Linda Maio. So we’re in session right now, so we’ve come down to be with you, we’ve come down to thank you for joining us, for new libraries for South and West. OK! There’s one word in Measure F (sic) that’s in contention, it’s called the word ‘demolition’, and because of one word we may not have south, what, libraries for south and west for our kids, for our families, for our seniors, and for our disabled. It’s simply not fair. It’s simply not right. We have to go ahead with what we’ve got, and what we’ve got is the taxpayers, the taxpayers of Berkeley, saying ‘Yes! We want good, quality, libraries for all of Berkeley’. (Applause, and a few words inaudible). “…for all our libraries. And so with your help we have to get the word out because once taxpayers hear it, let me tell you once they hear it, they’re angry. They’re angry because we’re stalled. And we’re stalled because of a few people who nitpick and really, there’s no place to go, for them. There’s no other solution for um, um, for good, decent, safe, libraries for our kids and for our (inaudible, shouting in background).”

(Applause).

COUNCILMEMBER MAX ANDERSON.

“Greetings everybody! It’s good to see you here. And the Tea Party guy can go someplace else (pointing to man shouting about the budget). (Laughter from crowd). (Next Phrase inaudible). “Your presence here means you have reinforced the commitment that this City expressed on Election Day in 2008 that we want good, quality, modern libraries in all parts of our city. We want a fair and equal distribution of resources in the City and we want, we want our families, and our children, to have access to the materials, and the education, and the books that they need to have a successful life. And that goes for whether you live in North Berkeley, whether you live in the Claremont area, or whether you live in South or West Berkeley. (applause) A few years ago my wife and I decided to remodel our kitchen. So we went in and we started work on it. We had no plans to tear down the wall, but what we found during the course of our process compelled us, if we were going to have a decent kitchen. Now, if any of you find dry rot and bad things in the walls of your house, and you’re planning on, um, revitalizing your kitchen, you’re not going to walk away from it because you found some dry rot! You’re going to fix it to the highest standards you can because it means something to you. And it means something to the City to have good libraries, to have opportunities in the City spread out in an equitable way so that we can add to the thrust of Vision 2020 and that’s making sure by the year 2020 all of our children with have access to access to areas of educational opportunities that will let them develop (inaudible) graduate from high school. We’ve had a (inaudible). And what people have to decide is, what side of history are you going to be on? Are you going to stand there, are you going to stand in the library door, or are you going to facilitate the availability of resources to all of our community? So you’ve done your job, and we’re going to go in there (pointing to Council chambers) and do ours!”

(Applause).

COUNCILMEMBER LAURIE CAPITELLI:

“I’m, I’m going to be brief, and I just want to say, number one, the voters overwhelming said, ‘spend the money, rebuild the libraries, have modern libraries for everyone.’ Number two we’ve spent, all of you, many of you, and hundreds of other people, hundreds if not thousands of hours planning these tour libraries. NO ONE stepped forward at any of the meetings I went to and said, Stop. NO ONE. It was only after a very small minority didn’t get their way or perceived of some way to stop this project that they moved forward, with, with, obstructionist activities. It’s time to move forward, it’s time we as a community said the majority, the overwhelming majority of people have said move ahead and build these libraries. Thank you.”

DAVE SNYDER: “Thank you Councilmember, we appreciate your support.”

(Capitelli pats Snyder on the shoulder and stands aside to listen to next speaker.)

Opinion

Budget Cuts Injure the Laboring Poor

By Eric Berkowitz

Wed May 11 11:25:00 -0700 2011

The state and federal budget crises are bringing deep cuts to government-sponsored public assistance. Many of California’s most needy, including a disproportionate number of children, are facing profound reductions in aid. CalWORKs, which provides day care assistance to working families with minor children, faces the largest cuts in 25 years. And day care for 11- and 12-year old kids of working parents stands to be slashed entirely.

Wrenching as they are, many feel these cuts are justified. Anecdotal stories often circulate about purported welfare cheats squandering the public’s money in casinos, at strip clubs, and on drugs. For example, Sacramento-based CalWatchDog recently accused day care recipients of “sponging” off the state. A self-described conservative blogger called all welfare recipients “lazy good-for-nothing moochers” who take “extravagant vacations in Hawaii.” Assemblewoman Shannon Grove, R-Bakersfield, wants CalWORKs parents to be tested for drugs. If the parents fail, then the kids would be cut off.

As all taxpayers find their wallets a little thinner each month, the temptation grows to view public assistance recipients as undeserving.

But such stories are usually false. Today’s
As accusations fly against those on public assistance, we should remember that many of the people we are abandoning make valuable long-term contributions to society. When they are forced out of their jobs and onto food stamps or other emergency aid, the costs to everyone will be even higher.

Eric Berkowitz is a San Francisco attorney who volunteers at Bay Area Legal Aid, as well as other legal aid groups. The women discussed in this article are not clients of Bay Area Legal Aid.

Song of the Wealthy Man
By Carol Denney
Tue May 10 20:29:00 -0700 2011

Chorus: it’s the song, it’s the song
the song of the wealthy man!
always right, never wrong!
try to be just like me if you can!
it’s the song of the wealthy man!
you are not my brother we’re nothing alike
I’m driving my hummer you’re riding your bike!
if I were in your shoes I know what I’d see
if I were in your shoes I’d want to be me!
(chorus)
you are not my sister no how and no way your troubles won’t ever come darken my day!
you’re different it’s your fault you’re stuck in a ditch you should have planned better like me and got rich! (chorus)
I am not your keeper so get on your knees and if you want something you’d better say please!
it’s best if you flatter obsequously I’ll hear you much better if it’s about me! (chorus)
if you’re out of money well I’m not to blame of course I’m a winner I made up the game!
you should have planned better it’s easy to see go talk to your broker quit whining to me! (chorus)
a snap of my fingers they follow like geese I own the officials I own the police! the sidewalks are mine and the medians, too so get up and move before I arrest you! (chorus)
when you’re poor well of course no one listens to you
It’s amazing what big piles of money can do!
I encounter agreement whatever I say
And if they try to tax me I faint dead away! (chorus)
raise a glass to the rich ‘cause they’re better than you better shod, dressed, connected, and well insured, too!
money may not buy love as the songs always say but it buys politicians and they’re here to stay! (chorus)

If It Isn’t Patronage, What Is It?
By Bradley Wiedmaier
Wed May 11 11:27:00 -0700 2011

The Berkeley Library Management, has spent over two years falsely presenting South Branch Library as a disintegrating “cinder block” building. Actually nothing is further from the truth. It is a reinforced concrete, post and beam structure, which has been seismically tested. The alternating glass and concrete block infill are not the structure. The false presentation of the concrete block as the menace of disintegrating “cinder block” was deployed to rule out renovation.

The Library has tracked new construction for only the west side branches. The wealthier foothill branches will be getting new library additions, with inspired renovated branches. The West Side will get in South Branch an uninspired rebuild that has none of the textural richness of community history that renovation and expansion would provide. The wealthy neighborhoods will get the latest updated features combined with their heritage. South Branch will get only an uninteresting pedestrian stand-in rather than the community re-enforcement that North Branch and Elmwood will receive. If one wants to charge racism, there is more of a case with this clear differentiation.

The preservation community raised the issues of reuse years ago. The Library management plowed ahead with their staged and proponent packed community meetings. The early Noll and Tam Report which strongly supported renovation was shelved. The Library needed to change the narrative and started implying that anyone supporting the less costly new library renovation schemes with threatening the safety of library patrons, based on the false, crum-
blending “cinder block” fiction. And now they are implying the other side with being racist, with no basis.

Where all new construction runs twice to three times the cost and budget, likewise the commissions will be twice to three times the size as those for more efficient less costly renovation. Also it is more labor intensive to render an inspired renovation and expansion than the bulldozed clean slate, slam bang, one dimensional fast and dirty new job. That extra labor and intensive care cuts into design and contractor profits. These are the reasons that renovation is being slandered and blocked.

Local community architects have not been involved at South Branch. An award winning Berkeley designed building will be replaced by a San Francisco architect’s design. These outsiders have received an inordinate amount of commissions in San Francisco beyond their reputation, and their disappointing design is reflected in the mundane proposal.

All of this though is secondary to the cover up of the Berkeley Library Management change of Library Program through proposed construction changes, rather than presenting the proposed program changes to the public for approval. Reference desks have been combined with other library services. Books have been de-emphasized in proportion to building size. Where one extra foot of bookshelf was the hidden request in the Library’s instruction to the architect’s, this will actually mean vast decrease in the book proportion relative to library building size. This was all internal and hidden from the public.

Is it racism or is it commissions for the friends of the Library? Why shouldn’t the west side receive what the foot hills are getting? Enough of the B.S. charges of racism and smoke screens which in reality undercut the authentic fight against racism. Those who cry wolf and undercut legitimate anti-Racist efforts are no friends of that fight or libraries.

US Style Investigative Journalism Has to Lie

By R.G. Davis, Ph.D.
Wed May 11 09:36:00 -0700 2011

Now that Wikileaks has revealed the lies of the US Government re: Guantanamo prisoners and other events, the commercial newspapers that pretend/assert they are telling the truth, we know are lying. Fiction films tell more truths then half-truth documentaries. The truth has to be a lie or else it is not believed. Lies imitating truths are better than truths. It is thereby essential to lie in order to establish the truth.

This is not unknown to many short-minded Americans who are so used to distorted truths, they hardly know the difference between a lie (fact) and the truth (fact), therefore prefer a lie to more easily accept to the necessary denials about their society.

Nationalism and patriotism is asserted by the less wealthy. The millionaire and billionaires need not assert their patriotism (they make money) don’t pay a fair share of taxes since they invest in other nations and sequester millions from their own nations while the middle and lower classes are the first to raise their shirts with USA on it as the US asserts /CIA/ Home Land Security plus Obama the Bamba all insist they killed Osama ben Laden. Was it state murder, assassination, “Shot in the eye in a firefight,” was it a Mossad style killing, plus 40 minutes of invading another country?

The function of that death, with burial (dumping at sea as the “Moslem custom”) to avoid his living interrogation that would have brought up his CIA connection: “What the CIA creates they can Kill.”

If the repeated convoluted story is true it should lead to lowering the investment in terrorist defenses. Si o No? In the short run, one or two people might now ask: “Isn’t terrorism dead, over? Not so, the government news media immediately said it is not, thereby admitting that inevitable retaliatory acts against US Embassies around the world, along with the 1000 military bases and US corporate headquarters making the killing --“snuff him out, win-win, Got Him,”-- likely to produce more anti-US activity around the world. Not inside this country but other places beyond the mindset of young Americans who are forced to speak one language and read TV and computer adds.

We should notice that Al Qaeda is hardly centralized with the leadership dispersed as it should be in resistance, guerrilla, revolutionary or religious oppositional groups fighting state run colonial militaries. The fatwa or anti western sentiment posed in religious terms of a war “Between civilisations” (US version similar to a Muslim one) that every Muslim or Arab or non-Western person is responsible for resistance and should oppose Western Civilization is a lively argument.

[Saudi Arabia, a 21st century Kingdom intertwined with US Oil corporations sustained by reactionary religious and undemocratic thoughts controlling religious sights as well. Add-on Jewish Israeli control of religious cites in Jerusalem All this gets tangled to produce wonderful contradictions] Thus non-members of Al Qaeda or the Taliban or ordinary humans who think consumerism, capitalism, colonialism, destructive wars and western culture are all abominable, will take up some act of retaliation and destruction both of others and themselves. Why not? Suicide bombers don’t have voting rights or any rights, so going to heaven (a special cemetery for Muslims and other resisters) is Saint-hood, Inshallah, Allah be Praised and a mitzvah.

The joy of the crowds in New York City full of unemployed and unemployable youths screaming USA, with Champion songs, like a football game, Roman orgy, celebrating the killing of another human plus 4 or 5 others, is all post modernized to become a video sports-war game. Now we are onto a sociological anthropological track, all is on international TV making the celebratory victory in this country, result in an angry response in other countries. Another horrific invasion, revenge killing, macho number one, two, and three US style, similar to Israeli kidnapping, assassinations and murder in any country they can get away with. The US of A the “big bully on the block.” (Quote Obama).

To round out this thought piece on lies and truths. Wikileaks apparently thought to follow Daniel Ellsberg’s approach at first by releasing cables to only major commercial newspapers. However since the corporate media is invested in lies, truths, half-truths, they edited those cables and in many cases did not print all the news nor the lies and truths, rather sorted out what lies and truths the newspapers thought would attract readers but not government reaction repression or legal challenges.

Now comes the third and forth contradiction.

In the current revelations of secret documents Attorney General Holder has declared the lies of the Government about Guantanamo prisoners are top secret and cannot be used in court by attorneys defending the abused prisoners. Democracy rules and reveals that the courts are rigged to admit only that which asserts the State and the prosecutors want (go-get em, jail-em inject-em) and not the defendants who have been tortured and wrongfully charged with false accusations. For anyone who has been thru the court and jail system that is the way it most often works.

The lesson (Lehrstück in Brecht’s terms) is in print and if it is in the newspapers, as everyone knows, it must be the truth.
Murder is Always Murder

By Michael Paul Hardesty
Thu May 12 09:56:00 -0700 2011

Right after 9-11 the Taliban offered to turn over Bin Laden to the US for a trial.

The typical American Empire response was to blow the offer off and kill more innocent Afghans than were killed at 9-11. It came out that Osama didn’t resist with arms so they just murdered him.

Why not have a trial and learn something? Let’s take the editor’s logic to its reductio ad absurdum.

If we had killed Stalin in the 20s we would have saved 70 million Soviet lives. If we had killed Mao in 1949 we would have saved 110 million Chinese lives. If we had killed Castro in 1959 we would have saved 17,000 lives. We DID save tens of thousands of lives by killing the Communist mass murderer Patrice Lumumba, who was busy setting up a Communist dictatorship in the mode of Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. And the list goes on and on.

Pinochet took 3,000 Chilean lives but it was nothing compared to what would have happened if Allende had established the full fledged Communist state that he was working for.

On what basis should we have killed Saddam Hussein in 2002? He wasn’t involved with 9-11. At the time of the limited gassing of the Kurds in 1987 the Reagan Administration claimed that Iran had done it.

So when was FedGov lying? But old libs love to get their rocks off reliving the not so glorious days of the mythical ‘Good War’ under what amounted to a virtual dictatorship here.

The editor still can’t get over Ralph Nader’s challenging the DLC clone Gore. Gore chose LIEBERMAN was his running mate, for Christ’s sakes what more do you need to know? Nader criticized Israel and a litany of anti-progressive measures undertaken by the Clinton Administration. Gore had no response because Nader’s accusations were all true.

The list of the Democratic Party’s betrayals of leftist beliefs would fill an encyclopedia and after 2004 a lot of us realized that the US Left was braindead and following the warmongering Democratic Party off the cliff.

Obama is a total fraud and yes, he will reelected next year as the Captain of the Titanic. On foreign policy he has proven to be the DLC hack he always was. His GOP opponents are all neocon, fundy, Bible banging, Israel-centric certified nutcases. Ron Paul would be the only real alternative but the AM rightist motormouths like the Weiner-Savage, Blowhard Rush, Bully Boy O’Reilly and Sean Insanity oppose him. Unfortunately Ron is anti-Ayn Rand’s Objectivism, believes in something called God and is anti-abortion.

There’s nothing to be ‘relieved’ about in Bin Laden’s murder. Between the US, Israel and the EU, ten new Osamas are created every day. And come to think of it the original Osama was created by US policy in backing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and posting US troops there.

Don’t Americans ever learn? Our last justified war was the American Revolution, otherwise we would be part of the PC British police state now. Obama has really castrated the anti-war movement in the US Left, which many of us thought was its only good part. Ok, LibDems, go back to your normal torpor and cheer on your leader, who has Clintonesque contempt for you.

Letters to the Editor

Clarification; No Justification for Tax Breaks to Oil and Gas Companies; Library Letter; A Book of Memories; Assassination of bin Laden; A “Precise” Attack near Islamabad

Clarification

When I wrote my commentary about the current controversy surrounding the proposed renovation or demolition of the South branch of the Berkeley Public Library, I did so with the sole purpose of pointing out a very important issue that seems to have been entirely left out of this debate; the lack of compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) at the South branch.

The reason why I endorsed demolition and replacement of the structure is because I simply cannot see how the present building can be made ADA compliant, given its small size. However, I am not completely wedded to the idea of demolition. If the present structure can somehow be made ADA compliant, then fine. Let’s do it!

Frankly, I still can’t see it happening.

Blane Beckwith

* * *

No Justification for Tax Breaks to Oil and Gas Companies

How can Congress continue to justify billions in unneeded tax breaks, loopholes that for too long have fed our dependency on dirty, carbon-polluting fuels?

Are members of Congress really serious about deficit reduction when year after year they rubberstamp these tax breaks -- subsidies that in reality are $4 billion lost to the U. S. Treasury over 10 years?

If reducing oil dependency and cutting carbon are not compelling enough reasons to repeal these tax breaks, surely using these lost funds to cut the deficit is, in a Congress reeling with deficit-reduction fever. I hope our members of Congress will do right and push for repeal of oil company tax breaks.

The bottom line is that the GOP in charge of the House, are not looking for ways to address serious decisions that would change how business is conducted in America; when it comes to curving oil’s damage to our health, environment, wildlife, safety to its workers, and ultimately, to our dependence on foreign oil, as well as domestic use. So where are the jobs going to come from in the future?

Gus Gomez

* * *

Library Letter

I thoroughly dislike the landmarks preservation concept, but I support the lawsuit against the demolition of the libraries using funds not earmarked for that purpose. Why should anyone vote for bonds, if the city can simply interpret the language anyway it wants, and take the money and spend it on anything they want? If demolition is such a great idea, put a bond on the ballot that replaces the existing bond, and explicitly allows demolition. The ends and the means cannot be disentangled.

Robert Clear

* * *

A Book of Memories

My most cherished possession, oddly enough, is a worn 25-year old address book. Printed in China exclusively for Marcel Shurman and beautifully illustrated by Nazhid Aryan Ghodsi, this 5-1/2” by 7” book is one I refer to daily. It’s always on my desk. On the inside cover I’ve noted all kinds of personal data -- password to my computer, ATM number, Kaiser primary doctor, attorney, etc.

I love the layout of the book: name and address, phone number, and e-mail. Each alphabetized page bears a lovely illustration. On some pages I’ve slashed through names with a dark pen, marking “deceased.” Alas, on many pages there are more “deceased” than living. But that’s life, I guess. Leafing through the pages evokes so many memories --some happy, but often sad. For example,
on p. B, my dear friend Maria, now dead, survived two years with her infant daughter in a Nazi concentration camp, yet harboring no bitterness, only gratitude for making her way to the U.S.

On another page, I’m reminded of a dear, dear friend, Marty, with whom I worked at U.C. Her home went up in flames in the Oakland hills fire storm. She also bore up cheerfully under the loss of her home and all her worldly possessions. But the trauma took a toll of her stalwart spirit and she died of a stroke a year later.

I still lament the loss of my friend, Gloria, with whom I traveled in Greece and Turkey, as well as a cruise on a Princess ship, where we paused and observed a moment of silence at the 9/11 site. At the risk of being totally morbid, Gloria succumbed to pancreatic cancer two years ago. Since I’m dwelling on these somber cases, p. S bears the name of another dear friend, Beverly, battling Parkinson’s Disease, which is rapidly robbing her of her passion for travel, theatre and movies.

On a more cheerful note, on p. E, I recall with great pleasure the 32 or more wonderful Elderhostel trips I’ve taken over the past few years -- Great Britain, Italy and France. I hope to take a trip to Santa Fe later this Spring.

Again, striking another cheerful note, on p. U, I’m extremely grateful for the many years I worked at U.C.’s Boalt Hall Law School and where I now serve on the Board of Directors of the U.C. Retirees’ Association. I’m thrilled and quite literally overcome with the knowledge that the University of California at Berkeley is regarded the leading University in the World!

From all of the above, I believe you can appreciate why this Address Book is such an important part of my life, representing as it does, vivid memories of my life in Berkeley and the campus community.

Dorothy Snodgrass

Assassination of bin Laden

President Obama said that the bin Laden raid was one of the most successful intelligence and military operations in America’s history. “This week has been a reminder of what we’re about as a people, the essence of America, the values that have defined us for more than 200 years, they don’t just endure - they’re stronger than ever.” According to Obama, our values include the unauthorized incursion into Pakistan’s sovereign territory to illegally assassinate an unarmed Osama bin Laden and members of his entourage.

From the flag-waving, the dancing in the streets, the shouts of joy, feelings of revenge, and “patriotism,” I guess many Americans agree with Obama.

By assassinating Osama bin Laden, we lost any ideological advantage we might have had -- the promotion of democracy, freedom and human rights. We became the thugs our enemies say we are. As Walt Kelly’s Pogo remarked, “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

Ralph E. Stone
Judi Iranyi

A “Precise” Attack near Islamabad

I recently wrote to President Obama, instructing him that the price of my vote in the next election was freedom for Pfc. Manning. Will the U.S. President’s numbers continue to soar when the Israeli Prime Minister speaks to Congress later this month? Won’t it look like one too many trumpets? The Israelis held off when hit by Scud missiles during the Iraq shock’n’awe. Will they stay home for the continuing Osama post-mortem?

If the Pakistani secret service were protecting Osama bin Laden (as is conceivable because of the proximity of Islamabad) why would commentators like John Yoo of UC Berkeley Boalt Hall claim -- as the CIA Director or his clone and now Ambrose also claim with complicity -- that the U.S. identified one of the brothers as a courier with connections to the former number three of Al Qaeda and a mastermind of the September 11 attacks who was captured in 2005 & so forth [meaning, that the incarcerated individual was tortured, as were so many others.]

In reply to Prof. Yoo’s unsupported assertion that “torture helps:” another lawyer, a professor named Obama used a recent interview to call on Pakistan to investigate what kind of support Bin Laden may have received while hiding. “We think that there had to be some sort of support network for Bin Laden inside of Pakistan,” Prof. Obama said.

“But we don’t know who or what that support network was. We don’t know whether there might have been some people inside of government, people outside of government, and that’s something that we have to investigate, and more importantly, the Pakistani government has to investigate.”

But will Yoo claim he is legally entitled to the reward money for the big kill, or the extraction of the corpse and its burial at sea, since he wrote the waterboarding memo for Obama’s immediate predecessor? And will he give a taste to freelance reporters and letter-to-the-editor writers?

Richard Thompson

Wild Neighbors: Collateral Damage in the Rodent Wars

By Joe Eaton
Tue May 10 10:55:00 -0700 2011

Damage in the Rodent Wars

Wild Neighbors: Collateral

Columnists

Ashy storm-petrel in the hand: victim of killer mice?

Duncan Wright (via Wikimedia Images)

Burrowing owl: Fish and Wildlife Service

scapebird?

Alan D. Wilson (via Wikimedia images)
South Farallon Island, that great seabird metropolis 32 miles west of San Francisco, is infested with house mice. That’s nothing new; the mice have been out there since the 1800s. There used to be feral cats and rabbits as well, but they were exterminated around 1974.

Now the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the agency that manages the Farallon National Wildlife Refuge, is going after the mice. Their plan is to air-drop the potent rodenticide brodifacoum in pelleted form all over South Farallon. FWS says this is necessary to protect the island’s population of ashy storm-petrels, a California Species of Special Concern. This small nocturnal seabird nests only on offshore islands along the California and Baja California coasts, with an estimated 4000 breeding pairs on the Farallons. The Channel Islands have a similar, perhaps slightly larger population.

I am not by any means a mouse-hugger. I recognize the need to manage, lethally if necessary, invasive animal or plant species that threaten the survival of vulnerable native species. But I don’t think FWS has made a convincing case that aerial broadcast of rodenticide is the best option in this situation. History suggests that it’s difficult to pull off this kind of operation without significant nontarget mortality — the killing of other wildlife species, including some of conservation concern.

Although rodenticide airdrops were apparently pioneered in New Zealand, the technique was first used in North America in 2001-02, against black rats on Anacapa Island, part of the Channel Islands group. (If you’ve read T. C. Boyle’s new novel When the Killing’s Done, this story may be familiar.) The island is home to an endemic subspecies of rufous-crowned sparrow, a state Species of Special Concern, and an endemic subspecies of deer mouse. FWS set aside a no-drop zone to minimize the impact on the sparrow, but a recent report in the conservation journal Oryx acknowledged significant (unquantified) mortality. The native mice also took a hit; some were taken into protective custody beforehand and later released to repopulate the island.

FWS also tried to mitigate raptor mortality by capturing and/or relocating Anacapa’s hawks and owls; nonetheless, 3 barn owls, 6 burrowing owls, and an American kestrel were poisoned. Other victims: 9 species of passerines, from ravens to orange-crowned warblers, and western gulls.

In 2008, FWS dropped 46 metric tons of brodifacoum bait on Rat Island in the Aleutians to eradicate the resident black rats. Afterward, carcass surveys recovered 46 dead bald eagles; 12 of the 16 tested for brodifacoum had lethal levels. Other casualties:

- 320 glaucous-winged gulls (24 of 34 positive) and 25 other species of birds. With the Anacapa experience to draw on, this is not an impressive learning curve. Despite mitigation attempts, non-target mortality seems inevitable.

Beyond that, the extent of the mouse problem on South Farallon is not entirely clear from the agency documents I’ve seen. Mice do attack petrel eggs and chicks. But some documents, notably the Farallon National Wildlife Refuge Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (www.fws.gov/cno/docs/FNWR_CCP_FINAL.pdf) and its appendices, put more emphasis on predation by wintering burrowing owls. Note that the burrowing owl is also a Species of Special Concern.

Here’s the scenario: every year, juvenile burrowing owls, an average of 2 to 5 annually, somehow make their way to the islands. They prey on the mice until the mouse population crashes, as it periodically does, in late winter. Then they switch to ashy storm-petrels. By the end of the season, most of the owls have either starved to death or fallen prey to the islands’ peregrine falcons. The mice are important not so much as direct predators as a temporary prey subsidy to the owls.

FWS invokes the Santa Cruz Island pigeon-fox case as a comparable situation. The short version is that bald eagles died out during the DDT years. Golden eagles moved in from the mainland and preyed on the superabundant feral pigs. They also went after the piglet-sized endemic island foxes, driving them to near-extinction.

You’d think that somewhere in its documents FWS would quantify the relative impact of mice, owls, and western gulls, which are also known to prey on storm-petrels. But no. It’s not clear how many petrels are killed by owls, or how many individual owls do the killing — although the CCP notes that some gulls become specialist petrel predators and notes the option of removing those individuals. If so few owls are involved, why not simply trap and relocate them as soon as they show up — especially since they are unlikely to survive the winter in any case?

There’s also an interesting report from PRBO Conservation Science, which has long had a presence on South Farallon. It calls into question the assumption that ashy storm-petrel populations are in fact declining. Analysis of mist-net captures of petrels from 1992 to 2010 showed no clear trends. The report mentions gull and owl (but not mouse) predation, but concludes: “Neither overall predation nor predation by species, correlated with CPUE [Catch per Unit Effort]” You have to wonder if the petrel is in imminent danger of extirpation after all.

We need to know a great deal more about predator-prey interactions on the Farallons before we resort to saturation-bombing with rat poison. FWS is currently accepting comments on the South Farallon Islands Non-Native Mouse Eradication Project. Letters can be addressed to:

South Farallon Islands NEPA Scoping Comments
c/o Gerry McChesney
Farallon NWR Manager
9500 Thornton Avenue
Newark CA 94560

Eclectic Rant: The Future of Nuclear Power In The U.S.

By Ralph Stone
Tue May 10 20:48:00 -0700 2011

In order to keep the lights on and the motors running while reducing harm to humans and planet Earth, fossil-fuel power has to shrink. While we shouldn’t forget Three Mile Island and Chernobyl and the recent disaster at Japan’s Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant, we need a rational discussion about the future of nuclear power in this country without misinformation and histrionics. By 2030, power demand will probably double. To meet this demand for power without fossil fuels, we need both nuclear power as well as renewable energy.

Global Warming

A clear scientific consensus has emerged that global warming is occurring and it is caused by human activities. In the scientific field of climate studies, which includes many disciplines, a consensus can be demonstrated by the number of scientists who have stopped arguing about what is causing climate change. So a consensus in science is different from a political one. There is no vote. Scientists just give up arguing because the sheer weight of consistent evidence is too compelling, the tide too strong to swim against any longer. “...the debate on the authenticity of global warming and the role played by human activity is largely non-existent among those who understand the nuances and scientific basis of long-term climate processes.” In other words, more than 95 percent of scientists working in the disciplines contributing to studies of our
climate, accept that climate change is almost certainly caused by human activities.

And as the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the 2007 case of Massachusetts v. EPA, 127 S.Ct. 1438 (2007), that greenhouse gases endanger the environment and a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions are motor vehicles powered by fossil fuels. The Supreme Court further ruled that: “if EPA makes a finding of endangerment, the Clean Air Act requires the agency to regulate emissions.”

**Nuclear Power in the U.S.**

Presently, about 20 percent of our power is from nuclear power. The U.S. is the world’s largest producer of nuclear power, accounting for more than 30 percent of worldwide nuclear generation of electricity. According to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), there are 104 nuclear power reactors. Because many plants have more than one reactor, the actual number of nuclear power plants is 65 in 31 states. (This list doesn’t count military and scientific reactors, which are not overseen by the NRC.)

There are two operating nuclear power plants in California: Diablo Canyon, near San Luis Obispo, and San Onofre, about midway between Los Angeles and San Diego. Nuclear units at both plants use ocean water for cooling. Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) owns the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant, which consists of two units, which began commercial operation in May 1985, while Unit 2 began commercial operation in March 1986. Diablo Canyon’s operation license expires in 2024 and PG&E must apply to the NRC for a 20 year license extension.

Southern California Edison Co. and San Diego Gas & Electric own the two operating units at the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station. Unit 2 began commercial operation in August 1983, while Unit 3 began commercial operation in April 1984. San Onofre’s operation license expires in 2022 and Southern California Edison must also apply to the NRC for a 20 year license extension.

**Building A Nuclear Power Plant**

The cost of nuclear power includes the construction cost of building the plant, the cost of running the plant and generating electricity, the cost of waste disposal, and the cost of decommissioning a plant. There is a very high capital cost to build a nuclear plant, but once the nuclear power is up and running, it is cost competitive with other forms of electricity generation, except where there is a direct access to low-cost fossil fuels.

There is a two-step licensing process: one to build a nuclear plant, and another to operate the plant. Unfortunately, every nuclear plant design was different. This compounded the difficulties of obtaining NRC licensing approval since the NRC had to evaluate each individual design. For example, there were significant design flaws with the Three Mile Island nuclear plant, which led to reactor leak and operator confusion. After these flaws were disclosed, the NRC undertook an extensive review of nuclear plant design and in many cases ordered changes. I expect in light of the Fukushima Dai-ichi disaster, there will be another round of review of existing nuclear plants.

In 2009, the Obama administration announced that the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository would no longer be considered the answer for U.S. civilian nuclear waste. Currently, there is no plan for disposing of the waste and plants will be required to keep the waste on the plant premises indefinitely. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Energy, and the NRC have overall responsibility for the safe disposal of high-level radioactive waste and spent fuel. The safe disposal of nuclear waste is a concern.

**Fukushima Dai-ichi Disaster In Perspective**

Opponents of nuclear power are using a worst-case analysis to scare people by focusing on the nuclear disaster at Japan’s Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant. By only showing the worst-case consequences, people will tend to believe that this is the norm, while ignoring the fact that worldwide, over twelve thousand cumulative reactor-years have passed safely. Instead of using a worst-case analysis, we should instead ask what is the probability -- and therefore the risk -- of the event. This is called in scientific terms “probabilistic risk assessment” (PRA). (For a full explanation of PRA, see Using PRA, the probability/risk of a nuclear disaster like Japan’s or Three Mile Island, or Chernobyl is very low.

Let’s look more closely at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant disaster. Fukushima Dai-ichi is an outmoded 1966 plant, whereas modern nuclear plants have redundant passive-safety features that would likely have ensured Fukushima’s stability.

In addition, last month, the New York Times reported on the incestuous relationship between Japan’s nuclear power industry, Japan’s Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency, and politicians. Safety violations at the Dai-Ichi plant were allegedly covered up for years. This raises the possibility that a culture of complicity made the plant especially vulnerable to the natural disaster that struck Japan on March 11. Many experts argue that inconsistent, nonexistent, or unenforced regulations did indeed play a role in the accident.

Finally, to my knowledge, no U.S. commercial reactor has ever caused a single death and worldwide nuclear power has the lowest accident rate based on the amount of energy generated by any source. In terms of the environment, nuclear power emits about the same carbon-equivalent per kwh as that of wind power, and less than solar.

**Renewable Energy**

Renewable energy is an alternative to fossil fuels and nuclear power, which includes resources that rely on fuel sources that restore themselves over short periods of time and do not diminish. Such fuel sources include the sun, wind, moving water, organic plant and waste material (biomass), and the earth’s heat (geothermal). Although the impacts are small, some renewable energy technologies have an impact on the environment. For example, large hydroelectric resources can have environmental trade-offs associated with issues such as fisheries and land use.

Renewable energy accounted for 11.14 percent of the domestically produced electricity in the U.S. in the first six months of 2010 with hydroelectricity is the largest producer of renewable power. In 2009, the U.S. was the world’s largest producer of electricity from geothermal, solar, and wind power and it trailed only China in the total production of renewable energy.

In California, 31 percent of our electricity comes from renewable sources. Most of this renewable electricity comes from hydropower, but 12 percent comes from “new” renewables, which include wind and geothermal energy.

If renewable energy is to be developed to its full potential, however, the U.S. will need coordinated, sustained federal and state policies that expand renewable energy markets; promote and deploy new technology; and provide appropriate opportunities to encourage renewable energy use in all critical energy market sectors: wholesale and distributed electricity generation, thermal energy applications, and transportation.

**Conclusion**

The U.S. needs energy that is secure, reliable, improves public health, protects the environment, addresses climate change, creates jobs, and provides technological leadership. To replace fossil fuels, we will need both nuclear power and renewable energy. And what we need most is a rational discussion.
The Public Eye: Osama Bin Laden, Rapist

By Bob Burnett
Tue May 10 08:19:00 -0700 2011

Many epithets describe Osama Bin Laden, but rapist fits best. On September 11, 2001, Bin Laden orchestrated what was, in effect, the gang rape of the United States. We were violated and that explains why America’s recovery has been so difficult.

Rape is a horrific fact of life in the US, where more than 600 women are violated each day and 1 in 6 females have been subjected to sexual assault. It’s not a new phenomenon; for 2500 years rape has been a continuing theme in Western culture. In Greek mythology Persephone was violated by Hades and dragged into the underworld.

Bin Laden’s assault was war rape, an act intended to inflict long-lasting trauma, “to humiliate the enemy and undermine their morale.” His intent was both psychological and financial.

Bin Laden planned to destroy three pre-eminent American symbols: the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and White House. The latter was saved when brave flight 93 passengers caused the hijacked plane to crash.

Bin Laden intended to bankrupt the US and came close to accomplishing his objective. The direct cost of the attacks was more than $200 Billion. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 14.3 percent and the estimated loss by US stocks was $1.4 Trillion.

President Bush never understood what Bin Laden was up to. In response to the attacks, Bush initiated his ill-conceived “war” on terror. According to the Congressional Research Service this cost $1.283 trillion for military operations, base security, reconstruction, foreign aid, embassy costs, and veterans’ health care for the three operations initiated since the 9/11 attacks.” Bush created the behemoth Department of Homeland Security, which some experts estimate cost another $1 Trillion. But the actual cost was much more, as these estimates do not include expenses such as illness caused by the collapse of the twin towers or Iraq/Afghanistan war injuries, billions more.

(Nobel-prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz has estimated the Iraq war, alone, cost $3 Trillion.)

When Bill Clinton left office, before 9/11, the US public debt was $5.73 trillion and the US economy was strong. When George W. Bush left office, after 9/11, the debt was $10.7 trillion and the economy was staggering.

Bin Laden intended to fracture America’s spirit and sap our will to fight.

2977 died in the attacks. In the days and months after 9/11, many New York City rescue workers, as well as residents and employees who returned to the financial district prematurely, suffered a variety of respiratory problems. There was a high incidence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) “a mental health condition that’s triggered by a terrifying event. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event.” After 9/11 19 percent of those directly exposed to the attacks suffered from PTSD. (By way of comparison, 18 percent of women subjected to sexual assault suffer from PTSD.)

Americans, in general, were traumatized by 9/11. Anyone who watched videos of the attack or saw the towers collapse would characterize it as a “terrifying event.” Many civilians continue to have PTSD symptoms such as “intense fear,” “helplessness,” “numbness,” “depression,” “isolation,” and “lack of trust.”

The problem for rape survivors is that after their attacker is apprehended the trauma persists. Osama Bin Laden was killed, but Americans continue to suffer. In his May 1st announcement, President Barack Obama tacitly acknowledged this with a call for “unity” and a gentle suggestion that we look forward: “we are once again reminded that America can do whatever we set our mind to... whether it’s the pursuit of prosperity for our people, or the struggle for equality for all our citizens; our commitment to stand up for our values…”

But the bitter reality is that America was gang raped and has suffered the traumatic after-effects for ten years. On May 1st, we killed the perpetrator, Osama bin Laden, but this won’t heal our wounds. It won’t bring back the 2977 that died or heal the lungs of the first responders who toiled in the wreckage of the Twin Towers or cure the millions who have PTSD. And it won’t repay the billions we spent to find Bin Laden or repair our fractured economy. (And it won’t bring back the thousands of soldiers who died or suffered devastating injuries in Afghanistan and Iraq.)

In 1934, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote the Serenity Prayer: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, And wisdom to know the difference.”

Americans cannot change the past. We’ve killed Bin Laden but that alone won’t heal us. Now Americans must acquire the courage to make the changes we can make: rebuild our battered psyches and our economy.

Bob Burnett is a Berkeley writer. He can be reached at bobburnett@comcast.net

On Mental Illness: The Sacrifices of Being Medicated

By Jack Bragen
Wed May 11 09:34:00 -0700 2011

It seems baffling to many people that persons with mental illnesses often resist taking medications that are prescribed. I have addressed some of this in a previous edition of this column. To put it succinctly, it takes a very brave and steadfast person to voluntarily take psychiatric medication; and this is for a number of reasons.

Choosing to be medicated involves sacrificing a portion of one’s physical health. The newer antipsychotic, antidepressant, and mood stabilizing medications, while they do not cause as much immediate suffering as the older medications, often cause extreme weight gain and diabetes. This is an unfortunate fact that coincidentally causes higher profits for the drug companies and the medical establishment. This is something that also adds additional restrictions to the lives of those who are already very burdened.

Being medicated is a direct cause of physical and emotional suffering. The side effects of medications are different for each one, but there is a lot of overlap. We don’t get “high” off of most medications — on the contrary. Some antipsychotic medications cause a body stiffness that makes movement more difficult, and cause a person to feel that they are in a drugged fog, from which there is no end. Numerous medications cause slowness of reflexes and of movement. This adds a level of difficulty when someone would like to get some exercise. Exercising is of utmost importance for countering the risk factors introduced by medications.

(I do not have space here to cover all possible side effects of all psychiatric medications.)

Additionally, medications can cause a frequent, if not constant, “bad mood.” This is due to the depressing effect of some of the medications. Numerous types of medications can cause dry mouth and tremors. Dry mouth can contribute to tooth decay. Tremors make a person more likely to stand out as someone different.

Medications, for all of the above reasons, may shorten the lifespan of the person tak-
“Is he still alive?” If you’re over the age of say, 65, how many times have you heard or said or thought that! Moving quickly on...

Unique and well-known in world literature, this 86-year old writer of fiction is definitely still alive and writing, although unrecognized in the United States until recently. Identify the writer whose control over language and form as well as sympathy and humor and brilliant comment on how we live our lives are praised by critics!

Ruth Prawer’s family was Jewish. Her father was a lawyer from Poland and her mother’s father was cantor of Cologne’s largest synagogue. In 1934, her parents were arrested during a Nazi parade. On her way to her segregated Jewish school on Kristallnacht, she could see mobs going down the street smashing windows, and she returned home. Sponsored by friends in Coventry, the Prawers moved to London. She read War and Peace and Dickens in the air raid shelters.

After earning an M.A. in English from London University, she married Cyrus S. Hjbvala (pronounced JAHB-vah-lah), a Parsi architect, and moved to India in 1951. (Parsi refers to a member of the larger of the two Zoroastrian communities in South Asia; the other is the Irani community.) For the next 24 years, this small strong woman raised three daughters, wore saris, and began writing novels and stories that often dealt with the clash of East and West.

Her ironic, comic, and incisive examinations of contemporary Indian social relations from a Western sensibility are generally accepted as among the best of Anglo-Indian writings. Whether she is a true Indian novelist has been questioned. The Householder (1963) was her first motion picture project with Merchant Ivory Productions. Shakespeare Wallah (1965), a classic film for which she wrote both story and screenplay, was her first collaboration on an original project with director James Ivory and producer Ismail Merchant (deceased). Prawer Jhabvala was in her sixties when she began writing screenplays for them.

Films, she says, were a “nice change for me; before that I sat at home. I also met people I wouldn’t otherwise have done: actors, financiers, con men.” Though Jhabvala does not usually appear on the set, Ivory describes her as “merciless and exacting” in the editing room. “I like to come in again on the rough cut,” she says. “I was only interested in editing and inter-cutting that influenced my fiction a lot.”

In 1975 she received the Man Booker Prize for Fiction, a literary prize awarded each year for the best original full-length novel written in the English language by a citizen of the Commonwealth of Nations, and a mark of distinction even for nominees. She won for her eighth novel, Heat and Dust, in which the hippy narrator in 1970s India retraces her grandmother’s experiences as an English bride in the 1920’s disgraced by an affair with a maharaja. She received the BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) Award for Best Screenplay for the filmed adaptation of Heat and Dust. The DVD bears the title Autobiography of a Princess.

Uniquely able to adapt novels by other authors for the motion picture medium—E. M. Forster’s Room with a View and Howard’s End, Kazuo Ishiguro’s Remains of the Day, and the screenplay for Evan S.Connell’s Mr. and Mrs. Bridge and for her adaptation of Bernice Rubens’ Madame Sousatzka, she is also able to create original screenplays. Jefferson in Paris (1995) proved controversial, depicting an American icon enmeshed of Sally Hemings, the slave who bore his children, a fact subsequently confirmed by DNA tests. “If the film came out now, no one would turn a hair, … but then people were outraged. To me, it seemed a terrible thing that they kept slaves, but not such a terrible thing that families were intermingled. What else could have happened?”

Her early comedies drew comparisons with Jane Austen, in their anatomy of family and humor. All of her early books were written as if she were Indian. “In England, I had started writing as if I were English; now I write as if I were American. You take other people’s backgrounds and characters; Keats called it negative capability.” After ten years of immersion in India, Jhabvala turned to ironic satires on westerners in India, not colonials but hippies in the 1960s and 70s, who confused sex with spirituality.

In the 1970s, after a quarter century in India, the Jhabvalas moved to New York. Since 1986 she has had dual British and US citizenship. Her recent work has been set in Britain and the United States. East into Upper East: Plain Tales from New York and New Delhi, published in 1998, led to her comment that in the pickled cucumbers of West Side delicatessens, she found a memory that evoked the pre-war German childhood she had lost as a refugee.
in England in 1939. “Once a refugee, always a refugee… I can’t ever remember not being all right wherever I was.”

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala spends most of the year in Manhattan with Cyrus, or “Jhab”, who is retired from his architectural practice in Delhi. Feeling a “terrible hunger of homesickness” for Europe, she says, “you try to reclaim what’s yours, to recapture your past - even the past you haven’t had”. In 1975, with the proceeds of the Booker, she purchased an apartment in New York, a “very European city”, but one she saw as innocent of Europe’s history. Her three daughters and six grandchildren live on three continents.

In “Myself in India”, an essay from the 1970s, Jhabvala wrote: “My husband is Indian and so are my children. I am not, and less so every year.” Later she wrote of a struggle “to keep my own personality and not become immersed, drowned in India”. She says: “First, I was so dazzled and besotted by India. People said the poverty was biblical, and I’m afraid that was my attitude too. It’s terribly easy to get used to someone else’s poverty if you’re living a middle-class life in it. But after a while I saw it wasn’t possible to accept it, and I also didn’t want to.”

Her 2005 book, My Nine Lives: Chapters of a Possible Past, illustrated by her husband, is her most autobiographical fiction to date. So called autobiographical fiction is not my cup of tea. As if sensing the potential illogic, she writes in her Apologia, “These chapters are potentially autobiographical: even when something didn’t actually happen to me, it might have done so.

Many novelists and short story writers are inevitably influenced by their own and experiences. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala will not attempt a memoir. “Novelists’ autobiographies are so boring. You empty yourself out in your fiction; I don’t give much away directly, but everything away indirectly.”

xxx

NEWS:

The Elder Justice Coalition has sent a letter to President Obama asking him to issue a proclamation and hold a signing ceremony for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD), held every year on June 15.

On May 1, 2011, the federal government retired paper Social Security checks and switched to electronic deposits for new benefit applicants. They are no longer an option for anyone applying for new federal benefits, whether through Social Security or other programs. Applicants must arrange for direct deposit to a checking or savings account. New applicants for benefits should have bank account information available. People who are already receiving benefits have until March 1, 2013 to switch. For help: www.GoDirect.org, or toll-free helpline at 1-800-333-1795.

New York City’s Council of Senior Centers and Services is gearing up for its May 11 City Hall Advocacy Day. It will bring 300 seniors to City Hall for an 11:00 A.M. press conference and meetings with City Councilmembers. Seniors will speak on their own behalf as they oppose 38 million dollars in cuts to senior services funded through the Department for the Aging. And on May 5, a Brooklyn Fights Elder Abuse forum was held.

In 2009 (the year for which data are available), 33,991 new long term care Ombudsman Program cases were opened in California, and 835 state/local volunteers were certified. (In the U.S. and D.C. 159,334 cases were opened.)

To subscribe to the wonderful newsletter, Engaging Aging (UC,B Resource Center on Aging), email to jisrael@berkeley.edu with “subscribe newsletter” on the subject line.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR: It’s always wise to call ahead to confirm date, time, place.

Monday, May 9, 1 P.M. North Berkeley Senior Center, 1901 Hearst, Corner MLK. Town Hall meeting with Kelly Wallace, Manager of Aging Services. (510) 981-5190.

Wednesday, May 11, 10 A.M. Emeryville Commission on Aging, at the Senior Center. Be sure to confirm by contacting Cindy Montero, Committee Secretary at (510) 596-3770.

Thursday, May 12, 6 P.M. South Berkeley Pubic Library. Lawyers in the Library. Free. Information: (510)981-6100.

Fridays, starting May 13, 20, 27, June 3, 1-4 P.M. Free. LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender] Senior Survival School with Open House. Learn more about community resources, your rights, and advocacy. Castro Community Meeting Room, 501 Castro at 18th in San Francisco (in the Bank of America building) LGBT seniors and people with disabilities are especially encouraged to attend, but all are welcome. Snacks. To register, contact Sarah Jarmor (415)703-0188 x 302, or Fairley Parson (415)296-8995 x 1.

Friday, May 13- Sunday, May 15, 2011. San Francisco: Legacy Film Festival on Aging

The Legacy Film Festival on Aging, On Saturday and Sunday films begin at 1:00 p.m. and continue through the day. The Festival showcases the best films from around the world that celebrate older adulthood, and deal with the challenges and triumphs of aging. At the Viz Cinema at the New People Building, 1746 Post Street (near Webster) in San Francisco. To see the full program: http://legacyfilmfestivalonaging.org/ Contact info@legacyfilmfestivalonaging.org.

Sunday, May 15, noon, free admission. Hertz Concert Hall, UC, B Dept of Music. (510) 642-4864. The winners of the Eisner Prize and other performance awards perform in a recital followed by the Department of Music commencement ceremony at 1:30 P.M.

Monday, May 16, 12 noon. South Berkeley Senior Center, 2939 Ellis, Corner Ashby. Town Hall meeting with Kelly Wallace, Manager of Aging Services. (510) 981-5170.

Wednesday, May 18, 7-8 P.M. Albany Branch, Alameda County Library, 1247 Marin Av. Free. Adult Evening Book Group: The Last Chinese Chef, by Nicole Mones. For information: (510) 526-3720 x16.

Wednesday, May 18, 1:30 P.M. Berkeley Commission on Aging, South Berkeley Senior Center, 2939 Ellis Street. Be sure to check Community Calendar and or (510) 981-5178 to confirm.

May 20, 27 and 30: City of Berkeley Senior Centers closed.


Monday, May 23, 10:30 A.M. West Berkeley Senior Center Advisory Council meeting. 1900 6 St @ Hearst. (510) 981-5180.


Friday, June 3, 12:30 P.M. Downtown Oakland Senior Center, 2000 Grand Avenue. Movie-Lecture Series continues with Sanity and Secrets in Suddenly, Last Summer. Center Director Jennifer D. King will present this controversial 1959 classic and lead a discussion of the themes explored in this movie starring Elizabeth Taylor and Katharine Hepburn. Free but you must RSVP by calling (510) 238-3284 or signing up at the Reception Desk. Refreshments.

Wednesday, June 15 World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

Helen Ripper Wheeler can be reached at pen136@dslextreme.com. Please, no email attachments or phone calls.
Dispatches From The Edge:  
The Great Game’s New Clothes

By Conn Hallinan  
Wed May 11 11:26:00 -0700 2011

According to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Leon Panetta, the U.S. never informed Pakistan about the operation to assassinate al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Ladin because it thought the Pakistanis could “jeopardize the mission” by tipping off the target.

Maybe, and maybe not. This is, after all, the ground over which the 19th century “Great Game” was played, the essence of which was obfuscation. What you thought you saw or knew was not necessarily what was.

The “official” story is that three CIA helicopters—one for backup—took off from Jalalabad, Afghanistan and flew almost 200 miles to Abbottabad, most of it through Pakistani airspace. Pakistan scrambled jets, but the choppers still managed to land, spend 40 minutes on the ground, and get away.

Is it possible the helicopters really did dodge Pakistani radar? During the Cold War a West German pilot flew undetected through the teeth of the Soviet air defense system and landed his plane in Red Square, so yes. Choppers are slow, but these were stealth varieties and fairly quiet. But at top speed, the Blackhawks would have needed about an hour each way, plus the 40 minutes on the ground. That is a long time to remain undetected, particularly in a town hosting three regiments of the Pakistani Army, plus the Kakul Military Academy, the country’s equivalent of West Point. Abbottabad is also 35 miles from the capital, Islamabad, and the region is ringed with anti-aircraft sites.

Still, it is possible, except there is an alternative scenario that not only avoids magical thinking about what choppers can do, but better fits the politics of the moment: that Pakistan’s Directorate of Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) knew where Bin Ladin was and fingered him, estimating that his death would accelerate negotiations with the Taliban. Why now? Because for the first time in this long war, U.S. and Pakistani interests coincide.

Gen. Hammad Gul, former head of the ISI, told the Financial Times on May 3 that the ISI knew where he was, but regarded him as “inactive.” Writing in the May 5 Guardian (UK), author Tariq Ali says that a “senior” ISI official told him back in 2006 that the spy organization knew where bin Ladin was, but had no intention of arresting him because he was “The goose that laid the golden egg.” In short, the hunt for the al-Qaeda leader helped keep the U.S. aid spigot open.

Indeed, bin Ladin may have been under house arrest, which would explain the absence of trained bodyguards. By not allowing the al-Qaeda leader a private militia, the ISI forced him to rely on it for protection. And if they then dropped a dime on him, they knew he would be an easy target. As to why he was killed, not captured, neither the U.S. nor Pakistan wanted him alive, the former because of the judicial nightmare his incarceration would involve, the latter because dead men tell no tales.

As for the denials: the last thing the ISI wants is to be associated with the hit, since it could end up making the organization a target for Pakistan’s home-grown Taliban. If the ISI knew, so did the Army, though not necessarily at all levels. Did the Army turn a blind eye to the U.S. choppers? Who knows?

What we do know for certain is that there is a shift in Pakistan and the U.S. with regards to the Afghan war.

On the U.S. side, the war is going badly, and American military and intelligence agencies are openly warring with one another. In December the U.S. intelligence community released a study indicating that progress was minimal and that the 2009 surge of 30,000 troops had produced only tactical successes: “There remains no clear path toward defeating the insurgency.” The Pentagon counter-attacked in late April with a report that the surge had been “a strategic defeat for the Taliban,” and that the military was making “tangible progress in some really key areas.”

It is not an analysis agreed with by our NATO allies, most of which are desperate to get their troops out of what they view as a deepening quagmire. A recent WikiLeaks cable quotes Herman Van Rompuy, president of the European Union, saying “No one believes in Afghanistan anymore. But we will give it 2010 to see results.” He went on to say Europe was only going along “out of deference to the United States.” Translation: NATO support is falling apart.

Recent shifts by the Administration seem to signal that the White House is backing away from the surge and looking for ways to wind down the war. The shift of Gen. David Petraeus to the CIA removes the major U.S. booster of the current counterinsurgency strategy, and moving Panetta to the Defense Department puts a savvy political infighter with strong Democratic Party credentials into the heart of Pentagon. Democrats are overwhelmingly opposed to the war but could never get a hearing from Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, a Republican.

The last major civilian supporter of the war is Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, but Gates, her main ally, will soon be gone, as will Admiral Mike Mullen, head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The shuffle at the top is hardly a “night of the long knives,” but the White House has essentially eliminated or sidelined those in the administration who pushed for a robust war and long-term occupation.

A surge of sanity? Well, at least some careful poll reading. According to the Associated Press, six in 10 Americans want out of the war. Among Democrats 73 percent want to be out in a year, and a USA Today/ Gallup Poll found that 72 percent of Americans want Congress to address an accelerated withdrawal. With the war now costing $8 billion a month, these numbers are hardly a surprise.

Pakistan has long been frustrated with the U.S.’s reluctance to talk to the Taliban, and, from Islamabad’s perspective, the war is largely being carried out at their expense. Pakistan has suffered tens of thousands of civilian and military casualties in what most Pakistanis see as an American war, and the country is literally up in arms over the drone attacks.

The Pakistani Army has been deployed in Swat, South Waziristan, and Bajaur, and the U.S. is pressuring it to invade North Waziristan. One Pakistani grumbled to the Guardian (UK), “What do they [the U.S.] want us to do? Declare war on our whole country?” For the 30 million Pashtuns in the northwest regions, the Pakistani Army is foreign in language and culture, and Islamabad knows that it will eventually be seen as an outside occupier.

A poll by the New America Foundation and Terror Free Tomorrow of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan’s northwest—home and refuge to many of the insurgents fighting in Afghanistan—found some 80 percent oppose the U.S. war on terror, almost nine in every 10 people oppose U.S. attacks on the Taliban, and three quarters oppose the drone attacks.

The bottom line is that Pakistan simply cannot afford to continue the war, particularly as they are still trying to dig themselves out from under last year’s massive floods.

In April, Pakistan’s top military, intelligence and political leadership decamped to Kabul to meet with the government of Hamid Karzai. The outcome of the talks is
India very much wants to see the 1,050-mile TAPI pipeline built, as it will carry gas from Turkmenistan, through Afghanistan and Pakistan, to Fazilka, India.

A lot is at stake, and if getting the peace process going involved taking out Osama bin Ladin. Well, in the cynical world of the “Great Game,” to make an omelet, you have to break eggs.

Back in the Victorian era the British Army marched off singing a song:

“We don’t want to fight but by jingo if we do/
We’ve got the ships, we’ve got the men, and we’ve got the money too”

But in the 21st century most our allies’ armies don’t want to fight, ships are useless in Afghanistan, there aren’t enough men, and everyone is broke.

For 33 years the people of Afghanistan have been bombed, burned, shot, tortured and turned into refugees. For at least the moment the pieces are aligned to bring this awful war to an end. It is time to close the book on the “Great Game” and bring the troops home.

Read Conn Hallinan at dispatches-fromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com

Arts & Entertainment

Theater Review: “Cripple” at Zellerbach

By Ken Bullock
Tue May 10 20:26:00 -0700 2011

“They all want to come to Ireland—Germans, dentists, everybody ... why?”

“Because the people in Ireland are so friendly!”

From the first glimpse of the lit stage—a tableau of a spartan country store, a woman behind the counter frowning over a can of peas she’s holding—the Druid production of Martin McDonagh’s The Cripple of Inishmaan, presented by Cal Performances at Zellerbach Playhouse on the UC campus, unimposingly announces itself as humorous theater ... theater and humor of the first water.

Set in the remote Aran Islands—where John Synge, of Playboy of the Western World fame (which Druid staged here triumphantly in 2008), located many of his plays and stories—The Cripple depicts a rather knowing lot of local eccentrics; no false naives here. They stare at cows, speak to stones, hoard the imported sweets they should be selling at the store, eavesdrop at doors and behind rocks on the beach to gather gossip—and incessantly slag the others for cow-gazing, stone-chatting, sweet hoarding ... Friendly and malicious Irish folk indeed! And McDonagh’s dialogue takes them through their paces, and us through ours, reiterating, and disabusing us and them of every cliche of colorful countryfolk and Erin Go Braugh.

There’s Cripple Billy Clavan (Tadhg Murphy), who reads books and stares at cows, mainly to get away from his “phony aunties,” who’ve raised him since his parents drowned themselves when he was an infant, chafing at his monicker and at admonishments like, “Stop thinking aloud! Did you ever see the Virgin Mary thinking aloud? It didn’t do her any harm!” His phony aunties, Kate and Eileen (Ingrid Craigie and Dearbhla Molloy, a splendid deadpan vaudeville act), keep the store, bicker, think of Billy constantly—and simmer with resentment when he leaves them and the island to find his way in the world, with “not a word, not a word, not a word, not a word!”

“I’ll leave my best piece of news till the end so you’ll be waiting for it!” announces local “news service” busybody Johnny PatteenMike (Dermot Crowley), later delivering the verbal banner headline that a film crew from Hollywood, led by “one of the richest Americans, Robert Flaherty (director of Nanook of the North), is on another of the islands making a documentary (Man of Aran, 1934).

Joining fractious tomboy and self-proclaimed beauty queen Slippy Helen (Clare Dunne) and hapless, telescope-happy Bartley (Laurence Kinlan), Billy eases his way onto the currach Babbybobby’s (Liam Carney) rowing to meet the film crew by showing him a doctor’s letter with bad news, gaining the sympathy of the boatman, whose own mother died of consumption. He doesn’t come back, but later sends a note that he’s off to The States for a screen test. “I don’t know at all what a screen test is!” his phony auntie fumes.

Up, down, over, around and sideways go the words these characters slander and cajole each other with, sometimes spat out as imprecations, other times rolling off the tongue like a bon mot. They both conceal and reveal, confirm and contradict character—and what that character’s up to—and bring in other characters never seen, only cattily referred to in the endless gossip.

The end of the play is, surprisingly, a qualified happy one—heavily qualified...
By Ken Bullock
Wed May 11 08:37:00 -0700 2011

“The martyr-drama was born from the death of Socrates as a parody of tragedy ... [and] at the end of The Symposium, ... the dialogue contains pure dramatic language, unfragmented by its dialectic of tragic and comic. This purely dramatic quality restores the mystery which had gradually become secularized in the forms of Greek drama.”

Walter Benjamin, in his book on Baroque tragic drama, pinpoints the remote origins of the medieval Passion, Morality and Mystery plays—the beginnings of our theater, as they played on until the Restoration or later, influencing Shakespeare and the other great playwrights of England and Europe in the Renaissance and Baroque periods—in the dialogues of Plato, who reportedly burnt his tetralogy of tragedies and began the trend towards dialogue that could embrace both the comic and tragic, which classical theater kept absolutely apart.

Medieval plays are still very playable today, though usually just staged at Christmas or for academic purposes. Manoel de Oliveira, the great centenarian Portuguese filmmaker—still cranking them out at 102—made an innovative and absorbing film of an ongoing Passion Play in his homeland, Acto do Primaver (‘Rite of Spring’) in the 60s. The Second Shepherd’s Play can be seen as a predecessor to Waiting for Godot; the Cornish Ordinaria ends its play on the Resurrection with an almost slapstick burlesque, as Pontius Pilate’s body is rejected for burial by the earth, spat out by the water of a river, and finally spirited offstage to Hell by a troupe of grinning devils, sticking their tongues out at the audience.

Sarah Ruhl’s (Eurydice; The Vibrator Play) three part Passion Play, which is running at Actors Ensemble of Berkeley in Live Oak Theater, lets the audience sit back and grin—or grimace—as its characters, over the span of a half-millennium, act out the pun Ruhl finds in the title, playing three ill-fated love affairs during stagings of Christ’s Passion in late 16th-century England, early Nazi Germany and the Vietnam-era American Heartland. To add to the fun, the triangle’s between (or among) the actors playing Jesus, Mary and Pilate—and there’s a visit by contemporary heads of state: Elizabeth I, Hitler and our own Ronnie Reagan (all played in the AE production by Lisa Wang).

Jon Wai-keung Lowe directs, and there’s a nice idea for background of a play that skips through the centuries and over the globe: a shadowplay tips in the silhouettes of scenery from behind, manipulated by the director, Paul Feinberg, Christine U’Ren and Thanh Tran, who offer their thanks in the program to Larry Reed and ShadowLight Theater, the great resident exponents of shadowplay in the Bay Area.

Some familiar faces and some not so familiar—Scott Ayres, Jacob Cribbs, Doug Kaufinen, Justin Lischzckie, Mervyn MacDougall, Norman MacLeod, Eric Reid, Elena Ruggiero, Addie Ulrey and Ms. Wang—make up the cast, doubling and tripling in the parts, as different characters take up the same roles in different epochs. All have their moments, and some troupe on through their several changes of personae and venue. In some ways, it’s a play that seems written for community theater—and that’s what the Passion Plays were, to a great extent: sacred community theater.

Jeff Hamby designed costumes; sound is by Nathan Lively and lights, Alecck Run-dell.

The passions on top of the Passion stir up various problems through the ages: unwanted pregnancy, secret homo-eroticism, rivalry between brothers ... Most interesting, though still fraught with some of the kitsch that often dogs even the best ideas Ruhl has, is the return of the Vietnam vet, sleeping outside his home, hoping to reclaim his part as Pilate in his hometown pageant in the Dakotas. Jangling the various soap operas are Wang’s recurrent appearances as Queen, Fuhrer and President ...

Hitler, in fact, did visit Oberammergau’s (still-ongoing) Passion Play on its 300th anniversary in 1934, but I doubt Elizabeth would’ve gone—her father, Henry VIII, with his break from Rome, downplayed religious theater, which was widely censored, in favor of the new secular theater which flourished during his daughter’s reign. Ronnie ... well, any port in a storm where he could harbor his regatta and run up the flag ... (I remember the stern look on Bill Walsh’s face when Reagan segued from congratulating the 49ers on their Super Bowl victory to dragging them to accompany him to the Hill, in 1985.)

Fridays and Saturdays at 7, Sundays at 2, through May 21. 1301 Shattuck (at Ber-ryman). $12-$15. 649-5999; aeoiberkeley.org

“That tree is dead, but it’s still moving with the others in the wind.”

Among the great ensemble plays, Chekhov’s Three Sisters, which has been translated and/or adapted countless times, is playing now at Berkeley Rep, directed by Les Waters, in a version by Sarah Ruhl, whose Passion Play is at Actors Ensemble of
Berkeley.

There’s the famous trio of sisters, bereft of their military father, but still hosting visitors from the provincial garrison. The sisters, born in Moscow, punctuate much of what they reminisce or argue about, aver or predict with sighs of longing for and determination to return to the capital.

Of Chekhov’s four great plays, it’s the one which covers the greatest swath of time, showing most vividly, in his inimitable fashion, the effect of it passing by in the most ordinary moments, interrupted by momentous occasions, disasters...

The various pieces of the play seem more or less modular, fitting and working together, but sometimes having an independent or slightly dissociated, sometimes strangely alienated, existence and relation to the other parts. (An example would be the reaction of the officers, who’ve been hangers-on at the sisters’ home, when transferred away from the town... their expression of sadness, leaving what seems to them a blessed time; the same period to the sisters has been wretched, a form of exile, like imprisonment.)

Chekhov often expressed his impatience with Stanislavsky, believing the director—who also initiated the central role of Vershinin, the incoming officer who knew the sisters’ father and falls into an affair with Masha, the middle one—trivialized the play, trying too hard to make it a sentimentalized psychological drama of a milieu, rather than as a new kind of comedy of manners, as he intended it to be played.

Productions of Chekhov’s plays nowadays announce they’ve rediscovered this, and add humor onto the superstructure like a slapdash paint job. (The same thing happens with productions of plays by Samuel Beckett, whose theater has similar roots as Chekhov’s.)

Unfortunately, the Rep production is no different, substituting sitcom-type punchlines for Chekhov’s undertow of humor. Ruhl, as in her own plays, concocts awkward moments when things almost stop for an instant, something archly funny is said, the audience titters—and the play plods on...

Such moments are usually those when the line announces a change of perspective in Chekhov’s suddenly changing, modular-style method of development. He changed the stage comedy from the inside-out, hollowing out the form but keeping the outer look of it intact, somehow, almost dispensing with the “arc,” the rise and fall of the plot of the conventional stage play of the time (sometimes it reappears within scenes)—it’s still the basic structure of most Hollywood movies—and substitutes circular patterns, entropic movements, ironies of repetition, echoes of what’s been and still to be said...

V. S. Meyerhold, the great Russian director—who, as one of Stanislavsky’s actors, initiated several roles in Chekhov plays, and became close to the playwright—mentions in his writings that Chekhov’s poetry existed in the rhythm of the lines, a subtle and shifting place, certainly, especially in translation. (Paul Schmidt’s translations seem to capture something of this, at least in performance, if not always on the page.) He also illustrated something profound and fleeting in Chekhov’s technique: citing the dance at the party in Chekhov’s last play, The Cherry Orchard, when the lady of the house dances with an old—and dying—family retainer, who’s dressed in costume as the Grim Reaper, Meyerhold comments, “For a moment he is, in fact, Death... but just for a moment.”

Chekhov’s plays and short stories, which were immensely popular and influential throughout the world from shortly after their early 20th century emergence, also were criticized—and praised!—for being formless, or improvised. Chekhov may have profited from the Romantic cult of improvisation in the arts, which certainly dated back to Lord Byron’s Don Juan, which influenced Pushkin. (And Stanislavsky created his own methods and cult of improv.)

But Chekhov was no improviser, just as he wasn’t a commercial playwright—at least after his youthful run of one act comic “vaudevilles.” And those vaudevilles may have determined the unusual form of tableaux and vignettes—the action-without-action, without moving forward—of those semi-modular parts of his great later plays. Meyerhold was probably influenced by this, as he was by popular stage entertainments, when he came up with his basic unit of play production, the actors performing an “attraction,” like in the sideshow of a carnival, like a burlesque routine.

Ruhl—and the director—seems innocent of these points. Her strong suit among her admirers seems to be her formlessness, the ongoing whimsicality of the playwright, going from one notion to another, rather than even what was thought to be the kind of free-fall of Chekhov’s characters through life and their own pondering of it.

But Ruhl’s “version” of Chekhov merely carries the decay of public perception of his dramaturgy another step, assisting in the canonization of the somewhat dreary—morbid, even—plays of remorse, resentment, memory and hope they’ve become on most American stages. Under these circumstances, the actors—as individual performers and as the crucial ensemble—are strait-jacketed, without much chance to do more than perhaps glitter uselessly at any given moment.

One of the finest actors in the Bay Area, James Carpenter, stands out, but in a role where he can’t really even serve as a counterbalance or point of comparison. One critic mentioned that he should’ve been cast as Vershinin. Had that been possible, maybe he could’ve shown what he did a few years ago in an otherwise mistaken production of Uncle Vanya at CalShakes—a credible Chekhov character in a crowd of actors forced to blither and walk in circles.

Tuesday through Sunday at various times at the Thrust Stage, 2025 Addison, near Shattuck. $14.50-$73. 647-2949; berkeleyrep.org

Meet David Bacon Tomorrow

Wed May 11 18:29:00 -0700 2011
street encuentro / meet artist David Bacon
Thursday, May 12, 6-8 PM, at the Windows

BEYOND BORDERS
Photographs by David Bacon
Addison Street Windows Gallery
2018 Addison Street (between Shattuck Av./Milvia St.)
Berkeley, CA
pril 22 thru May 31, 2011

Around and About the Performing Arts: Ragged Wing’s “Open”

By Ken Bullock
Wed May 11 10:34:00 -0700 2011

Plucky Ragged Wing Ensemble is opening Open, a new play by co-founder Amy Sass (who also directs), with live actors and puppets, based on the Bluebeard legend—and the key to the one door the bride can’t enter. Preview this Thursday, opening Friday, running Thursday, Friday, Saturday at 8 through June 11, at Central Stage, 5221 Central Avenue (near Costco), Richmond Annex. $20-$35 sliding scale. $15 students. (800) 838-3006; raggedwing.org. Also, Ragged Wing Youth Ensemble present “In Between,” staged stories the Youth Ensemble has written and acted.

Tuesday, May 24 at 7, Monday May 30 at 4 & 7, Tuesday May 31 at 5, Envision Academy, Downtown Oakland.
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Ken Bullock: Around and About the Performing Arts: Ragged Wing’s “Open”
IT'S SPRINGTIME. POLLEN IN THE AIR. FULL MOON AT NIGHT. EVERYONE IS CRAZY. THE SPRING RUT IS ON. WOMEN I WOULD TRIP OVER ALL WINTER NOW SEEM TO GLOW IN THE DARK. CAN I RESIST? WHEN HAVE I EVER RESISTED? NOW!

I LOOK IN THE MIRROR... AND SEE THE FACE I HAVE CREATED. YES... AGE HAS TAKEN MY BEAUTY. SIN HAS LEFT ITS SAD SCARS. YET... I CAN SEE MYSELF THINKING.

THIS MASS HYSTERIA IS MOTHER NATURE'S WAY OF INSURING THE RACE WILL CONTINUE. AND IT ALWAYS WORKED ON ME. I HAVE 700 POUNDS OF CHILDREN TO PROVE IT WORKED ON ME. PLUS EVERYONE'S ALL OVER THE LANDSCAPE, AND DISTRICT ATTORNEYS COMING OUT OF THE WOODWORK. BUT THAT'S OVER.

THIS YEAR WILL BE DIFFERENT. THIS YEAR I DEFY MOTHER NATURE! I'LL STAY IN THE BASEMENT. COLD SHOWERS. LOTS OF COLD SHOWERS. THIS WILL PASS, I TELL MYSELF. I'LL PUT A BAG ON MY HEAD.

I'M GOING OUT. HOW DO I LOOK?

GREAT!
BOUNCE

by Joseph Young

LONELINESS IS
THE SPECTRE
OF OUR NOT
BEING.

SCARY
STUFF
IS IT NOT?

I'M ALONE...
ALONE WITH MY
LONELINESS.

WERE YOU
GOING
WITHOUT
ME?

LONELINESS
IS A VERY
CRABBY
CHARACTER!

SHEESH!
WHAT A
SNEAK...