So, the dust has finally settled around here. Mike O’Malley (heretofore “The Publisher”, now “Chief Technical Officer”) and I are more or less smoothly ensconced in the routine of online publishing. Because we have been advised by our lawyer to wait and see what taxes the Berkeley Daily Planet LLC might owe (after our payroll service absconded with payments intended for the state and federal governments) we’ve been working for free (which is fine with us) without employees (somewhat harder).. In the past couple of months, we’ve been gratefully publishing work contributed by public-spirited Berkeleyans, both professional journalists and passionate amateurs, who haven’t been paid either. Now it’s time to ask the readers for their help in improving what’s here.

We’ve been very pleased with the success of one new idea, creating printable pages (“PDFs”) from the online copy. These PDFs are posted every week on the website so that anyone can print them out on standard computer printers. Greg Tomeoni and the other clever civic-minded people at Copy Central on Solano have availed themselves of the opportunity and are printing and distributing paper Planets for a nominal charge to cover their costs at several locations around town.

Now we are equally pleased to announce that we’ve gotten the help of the William James Association as a fiscal sponsor of a new non-profit Fund for Local Reporting, which has the specific goal of paying independent freelance journalists to cover hard news about matters of local importance for the urban East Bay, with a focus on Berkeley.

What is all too often ignored in the stampede to online publication is the question of who pays for newsgathering. It’s far and away the most expensive part of news publishing, with the cost of either printing or web publication far behind. Or rather, it should be the major investment, but all too often it isn’t.

Increasingly, publications are doing little more than taking in each other’s laundry. The same soft feature may be published three times: in a local blog, in a metro paper, and finally in a national paper—and meanwhile the hard news goes unreported by any of them. Some online news sites rely heavily on links to other sites, but all that means is that a vanishingly small number of original stories are endlessly republished, and there’s still almost no real reporting being done.

We were proud, last week, to be part of a joint project orchestrated with a long list of small publications by the very worthwhile organization Spot.Us in which investigative reporter Peter Byrne uncovered what looks like serious conflicts of interest on U.C.’s Board of Regents. This kind of collaboration works well for a story of statewide or regional interest, but is not as useful for covering small cities like Berkeley.

Advertisers are by and large no longer interested in local news sources, if they ever were. Many publications have experimented with various forms of subscriptions and pay-per-view schemes, but so far none have worked at any level. It seems clear that if local citizens want real coverage of local hard news, they’re just going to have to pay for it themselves.

That’s where the Fund for Local Reporting comes in. In the last year of the printed Berkeley Daily Planet, readers contributed almost $50,000 in a vain attempt to save it, which was much appreciated. Since the Berkeley Daily Planet LLC was not a non-profit, these contributions weren’t even deductible for the donors, which makes their gifts even more impressive.

It’s clear that there’s strong continuing interest in Berkeley in some form of local “paper”, whether online or in print. Since we went online, we’ve been offering free subscriptions, and so far at least 700 people or households have subscribed. Now we’re asking Planet fans to think about whether they can offer tax-deductible financial backing to the FLR.
Contributions will go directly into the pockets of the reporters, with the William James Association taking only a small percentage to cover their administrative costs. The berkeleydailyplanet.com website will serve as a free means of distributing the news stories funded by the FLR. The articles produced by independent reporters will be published first on this site, and can be picked up from there by other publications at no charge, either to link online or to copy for distribution in any form. Mike and I will continue to maintain the site without pay- ment, and will work with independent journalists on assignments, editing as needed, and providing technical support.

The Planet will also continue to be an open forum for ideas of all kinds, as it has in the past. No FLR funds will go to pay for opinion pieces or to support candidates for office. We will continue to welcome articles and graphics of all kinds freely contributed in the public interest.

How can you contribute to the Fund for Local Reporting?
1) You can send a check, cash or money order to:
   Fund for Local Reporting
   c/o William James Association
   P.O. Box 1632
   Santa Cruz, CA 95061

or
2) You can contribute securely online with a credit card using Google Checkout by clicking on the "Fund for Local Reporting" button at the right side of this page.

The amount of money raised for this fund will determine how much news of local interest you’ll see in this space in the future. It’s really up to you, our readers, to decide.

P.S.: Many readers will wonder if this is a first step toward resuming full-scale newsprint publication. Until our peculiar tax problems have been resolved, which could take years, Mike and I can’t be part of funding such an effort. The print-on-demand plan is working well with no help from us, so that’s probably the solution for dedicated print junkies in the near future at least. Here’s where you can now pick up printed copies in return for a small donation:

- Berkeley Public Library

**News**

**Berkeley Police Kill Armed Hit-and-Run Suspect**

_By Dan McMenamin, BCN_  
_Tue Jun 29 14:41:00 -0700 2010_

An armed hit-and-run suspect was fatally shot by Berkeley police after he fired a gun at them Monday night, a police spokesperson said today.

The suspect, who has not yet been identified, was shot by the officers near the intersection of Eighth and Camellia streets in Berkeley, police Sgt. Mary Kusmiss said.

Albany police had tried to stop the suspect, who was wanted in connection with a hit-and-run, at about 10:45 p.m. but he refused to pull over, sparking a chase that ended near Eighth and Jones streets in Berkeley where he jumped out of his silver Honda, Kusmiss said.

Albany police requested emergency assistance from Berkeley police, and eight officers responded. The officers were in the process of setting up a perimeter when one of them spotted the suspect walking on the east sidewalk of Eighth Street near Camellia Street, according to Kusmiss.

Three officers approached the suspect and asked him to stop. The officers noticed he had a semiautomatic pistol in his hand and ordered him to drop the weapon, she said.

Instead, the suspect allegedly turned and fired at least two shots at the officers, who returned fire, Kusmiss said. The suspect was hit and died at the scene, Kusmiss said.

No police officers were injured.

The three officers involved in the shooting are being interviewed this afternoon by the Police Department and the Alameda County District Attorney’s Office and will be placed on paid administrative leave, according to Kusmiss.

The suspect’s weapon was recovered near his body on the sidewalk, she said.

Kusmiss said the suspect was not carrying any identification, so the Alameda County coroner’s bureau will likely have to use fingerprints to confirm his identity. An autopsy is scheduled for Tuesday morning.

The shooting happened right in front of Berkeley Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church, according to church pastor the Rev. Brian Hunter. No church personnel witnessed it, he said.

He said that to have a shooting in the neighborhood is “unheard of.”

“I’ve been here for almost 15, 16 years, and there’s nothing that’s ever happened like this in this area,” he said. “This is very, very rare.”

Kusmiss thanked a handful of people in the neighborhood who witnessed the shooting and came forward to provide statements to police.

The witnesses “provided really important valuable info for the investigation,” she said. “We’re grateful in any crime when community members participate and we can work together.”

**Council Preview: Libraries, Waste, YMCA and More**

_Mon Jun 28 18:02:00 -0700 2010_

A controversial item on Tuesday’s Berkeley City Council Agenda has the innocuous subject line “Zoning Ordinance Amendment to Allow Development Flexibility for Existing Public Libraries”. It’s even on the consent calendar, a try for easy passage without discussion. Here’s what it means: “to allow (1) existing public libraries to be changed, expanded, or demolished and a new public library constructed, and (2) modification of any Zoning Ordinance requirement applicable to such projects with a Use Permit, rather than a Variance.” [emphasis added] The Public Library Users’ Association is up in arms, since the ballot measure to provide funding for what now looks like two brand new libraries said not a word about demolition, and also, they say, plans call for fewer books in the new buildings. Development Flexibility, for sure.

Department of Spending: “RECOMMENDATION—Adopt a Resolution authorizing the City Manager to execute a contract and any amendments with the Downtown Berkeley YMCA in the amount of $231,012 for fitness center memberships for City employees for the period July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011. (Meanwhile, the city’s contract with the invaluable NewsScan, about $20k a year, has been cancelled, supposedly to save money.)

The city staff also wants to buy some spiffy new trash cans, on credit, of course: “Recommendation: Adopt a Resolution authorizing the City Manager to execute a contract with Arata Equipment Company for the purchase of 31,000 curbside carts for the residential recycling program, at a cost not to exceed $2,507,310; and executing
a Schedule to a Master Equipment Lease/Purchase Agreement to purchase and make annual lease payments for the curbside recycling carts with Banc of America Public Capital Corp. for an annual lease payment not to exceed $410,000 to be paid over seven years at a not-to-exceed interest rate of 3.50%, with a first payment commencing no later than January 1, 2011.”

These are just a few of the highlights. For the full story, see the agenda and watch the whole show online on Tuesday.

**Council Preview: The Downtown Plan (Again, and Again, and Again)**

*Mon Jun 28 17:06:00 -0700 2010*

The Berkeley City Council will be presented with three competing versions of what might be a new Downtown Plan Tuesday night, if all goes according to the published agenda: Here’s what they’ll be trying to do.

14. New 2010 Downtown Area Plan

**Recommendation:**

1) Discuss the placement on the 2010 Ballot of a measure for voter approval adopting a Green Vision for the downtown, designating the Downtown Plan Area, adopting certain policies for the downtown, and stating the voters’ intention that the Council adopt a Downtown Area Plan that implements green vision and voter-adopted policies and,

2) Direct the City Manager to return with necessary CEQA Resolutions for final action on July 6, 2010.

**Financial Implications:** Unknown

Contact: Tom Bates, Mayor, 981-7100

b. From: Planning Commission (PDF)

**Recommendation:** Provide direction to staff as to any modifications to the draft of the New 2010 Downtown Area Plan, by working from Planning Commission’s draft DAP recommendations and noting changes desired by the Council. At Council’s request, Planning Commission’s draft DAP focuses only on goals, policies, and key development standards/actions, to provide a more accessible ballot-friendly Plan. In providing direction to staff, the Council should note staff’s preliminary analysis as to the adequacy of the 2009 DAP EIR, specifically that additional CEQA-related analysis and findings will be needed if the DAP is placed on the ballot. Staff will return in July for further Council discussion and possible action.

**Financial Implications:** See report

Contact: Dan Marks, Planning and Development, 981-7400

c. From: Councilmember Arreguin (PDF)

**Recommendation:** Place the community-developed Downtown Area Plan on the November 2010 ballot for voter approval.

**Financial Implications:** Unknown

Contact: Jesse Arreguin, Councilmember, District 4, 981-7140

At a glance, 14a might well not qualify legally as a real plan. It seems more like a statement of purpose, leaving out only motherhood and apple pie as goals. If you want lots of details, 14b is the version that the planning commission and the planning staff claimed they were writing at council direction—now that they’ve done it, the council seems to be changing its mind.

And the one which represents the two years or more that a citizens’ commission, DAPAC, put into drafting, as updated by members of the DAPAC majority, is up for discussion as 14c.

How the decision will be made is anybody’s guess. The council recess starts mid-July, so councilmembers need to make up their minds by then.

**Reader Opinion**

**The railroading of Michael Vick and the machine gunning of Deondre Brunston**

*By Jean Damu*  
*Tue Jun 29 12:51:00 -0700 2010*

Ordinarily it would suffice to allow the Michael Vick case to recede into a state of distant memory except that a Forbes magazine poll and the surfacing of a horrific video of a 2002 police murder of an African American youth insist that we revisit both incidents.

Recently Forbes magazine, the gatekeeper and chronicler of corporate culture, felt compelled to inform us that according to their yearly poll Michael Vick remains, for the second year in a row, America’s most detested athlete. Apparently white folks refuse to forgive and forget. Oakland Raider’s owner Al Davis, NFL quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones and golfer Tiger Woods round out the top five.

NFL quarterback Vick, readers will remember, was sentenced to 21 months in prison and rendered bankrupt after pleading guilty in 2007 of participating in an interstate scheme to engage in dog fighting.

Obviously Vick, a young African American millionaire had violated societies boundaries engaging in the long discredited sport of dog fighting. In the run up to his trial, however, mainline media heaped hatred and scorn on Vick to the point one would have thought America’s devil incarnate, Osama Bin Laden, had been brought to justice.

Black talking head for ESPN and the Washington Post Michael Wilbon labeled Vick’s crime as “heinous,” a word that has become the second most overused word in relation to crime, genocide being the first most overused word. The reasoning here is that if everything is heinous then nothing is not heinous.

Not that long ago mass murderer Ted Bundy was said to have committed heinous crimes. Today a young black man who bankrolled a dog fighting scheme is held to the same standard of hatred. To her undying credit comic Whoopi Goldberg was one of the very few public personalities who decried the racism involved in the public persecution of Vick.

But why, other than the Forbes magazine poll, revisit this desultory incident? Answer: the Deondre Brunston murder.

Deondre Brunston was a 24 year old youth living in Compton, Ca. After a domestic dispute his girlfriend called the police.

In a filmed interview Deondre’s aunt, Keisha Brunston explained what happened next.

According to Brunston, after police arrived and confronted Deondre things quickly escalated. Reportedly Deondre, for whatever reason told police he was wanted for murder and that he was armed. Neither claim turned
out to be true, but neither did police attempt to learn the truth.

What we see next in the video provided below is Deondre sitting on a porch communicating with police. Suddenly a police dog charges him and police open fire. Brunston was hit 22 times and flopped around like Bonnie and Clyde in the Sam Peckinpah film. By mistake the police also shot the dog. The police then rushed to embrace the dog which they thought was a black man.

The lessons provided in theses two relatively recent episodes are clear and unambiguous. In many respects little has changed since the days of slavery-a dogs life is worth more than someone’s who is perceived to be a jobless black man.

However curious, white America’s elevation of dogs to the iconic status of best friend is nothing new.

The final story proudly touted how “America’s senior military officer,” US Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, interrupted his busy schedule and “took time out... to stress the importance of [the soldiers’] sacrifice.” Speaking to hundreds of families of dead soldiers at the “15th Annual Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors National Military Survivor Seminar” in Crystal City, Virginia, Mullen claimed our country was “blessed” by being the “best country that’s ever been, because of the service of those who raised their right hand and went off to do their nation’s bidding.”
sacrifice that your loved ones have made” and promised “to have your needs met: to be supported for the rest of your lives.” As evidence of the Pentagon’s concern with the unmet needs of the survivors, Mullen’s appearance was designed to coincide with the grand opening of a nearby therapy camp for the children of slain soldiers. Perhaps in homage to the comic strip Peanuts and Charlie Brown, the Pentagon has dubbed the children’s therapy center “Good Grief Camp.”

The Pentagon’s Memorial Day page made no mention of wars other survivors - the 38,000 veterans who returned home disfigured and incapacitated by grievous wounds. [Note: Anti-war.com estimates the number of US wounded may approach 100,000.] Nor did the Pentagon memorialize the estimated 320,000 combat soldiers who suffer from traumatic brain injuries. Nor was their mention of the fact that our veterans are killing themselves at a rate of 18 suicides a day. These deaths are clearly war-related but the names of these “fallen” are not entered in the roll call of official “war heroes.” The “ultimate sacrifice” these soldiers and their families experience earns them no special mention on the walls of the Pentagon or on the stones of Arlington. These “fallen service members” will not be officially honored or remembered on this Memorial Day.

For Americans interested in truly “remembering the fallen,” there are many alternatives to the Pentagon’s Daily Casualty Releases. AntiWar.com offers a list of “Casualties in Iraq” and “Casualties in Afghanistan” presented under the rubric of “The Human Cost of Occupation.” AntiWar.com also offers estimates on the number of military contractors, academics, journalists, and civilians that have been killed in these two wars. These human losses (as well as the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi, Afghan and Pakistani civilians killed) also need to be remembered on Memorial Day. Other resources include the venerable Iraq Body Count, Icausalties.org, Cost of War and the BBC.

The major TV networks have occasionally featured photos of soldiers who have recently “made the ultimate sacrifice,” but it is the Washington Post that comes closest to matching Memorial Day’s challenge to “never forget” the many men and women who have died “in their country’s service.” The Post’s sobering “Faces of the Fallen,” provides an online list of the all the wars’ dead with names and photos.

The Post’s example is one that the Pentagon would be well served to match. Meanwhile, enquiries asking why the Pentagon has so far failed to post a detailed and comprehensive list of all of our “fallen,” has gone unanswered.

Gar Smith is a prizewinning investigative journalist, magazine editor and co-founder of Environmentalists Against War. This article was originally written for Memorial Day, but since the author was travelling it has arrived instead for July 4th.

The Brand Vultures – Keds & Co.

By Chime Tenzing
Tue Jun 29 13:26:00 -0700 2010

Keds’ new-fangled line of sneakers called ‘Tibetan Buddhist Shoes’ bearing images of the Dalai Lama, the Buddha, holy mantras, Tibetan national flag and other sacred images is a gross denigration of the faith which has millions of followers around the globe!

The disparaging act of Keds’ consumerist attitude has hurt the sentiments of millions of Buddhists around the globe with its new line of “Colorful and Beautiful” canvas shoes. Keds’ blatant attempt to capitalize on the growing ‘fad’ for Buddhism & reverence for the Dalai Lama in the West failed to gauge the consequences of its myopic vision, which was the result of its profit-centric, market driven strategy and greed for easy and quick bucks! It has nauseatingly overlooked the importance of respecting the values and ideals of the faith which has a growing follower’s world over during this time of crises of all sorts in the history of mankind! This is how Keds’ chose to reward the Holy Man who tirelessly travels across the globe to preach global peace and universal harmony!

As rightly pointed out by one of my fellow Buddhist brothers - Bhuchung D. Sonam - “We live in a 24x7 interconnected world where information is available at finger’s click. Thus people at Keds cannot feign ignorance about these sacred images and their importance in Buddhist culture and their roles in the practice of the dharma. Hence Keds’ Buddhist shoes are affront to Tibetans and a total disregard to their cultural values”. In the Buddhist context, Keds has committed an unpardonable sin by taking the sacred images of Buddha, the Dalai Lama and the holy Buddhist scripts out from their rightful places to the grubby American feet and neon-lit streets. With this single act of sacrilege and blasphemy, Keds has invited the wrath of the irate deities and would inescapably earn bad karmas for the future of its much treasured company.

Instances like this is not uncommon to the common men. In the recent past, the famed Indian painter M.F.Hussain had to face the wrath of the Indian Hindus for his paintings that allegedly denigrated the Hindu gods and goddesses. The irate and the devout Hindus charged against him as “in the name of artistic freedom Hussain had painted Hindu gods and goddesses in a manner, which deeply hurt the sentiments and sensibilities of patriotic Indians”. Apart from a complete ban on his paintings in India, Hussain had to flee home to Qatar on a self-imposed exile for the fear of his life. This clearly, like Keds’, is the consequence of the myopic vision Hussain was cursed with when he used his “creative freedom” at the cost of others!

Also, not so long time ago, we were all inundated and fed by the headlines and controversy surrounding the controversial Danish cartoon on Prophet Muhammad.

At that time the news piece that most of us read and re-read went something like this - Much ink and, unfortunately, some blood has already been spilled over the Danish cartoon controversy. The controversy burst ‘out of proportion’ to the extent that it had claimed some precious lives in the crossfire that ensued. The Danish editors should have known - in fact did know - that the drawings would provoke an outcry in the Muslim world. However, again like Keds’, the editor saab somehow overlooked the consequence and eventually ended up paying a heavy price!

There are instances in the past as well about Christians suing art gallery over ‘blasphemous’ statues of Jesus Christ. To share with you one instance, the sculpture of Christ with an erection by a Chinese artist Terence Koh was charged with denigrating
Christ and outraging public decency. Emily Mapfuwa, a 40-year-old Christian who was offended by the artwork, launched a private prosecution against the gallery for outraging public decency and causing harassment, alarm and distress to the public. Mapfuwa argued that the Baltic would not have dared depict the prophet Muhammad in such a way. But the Christian Legal Centre - an organization that aims to “promote and protect the biblical freedoms of Christian believers in the United Kingdom” - agreed to pay her legal costs!

Unlike people from other respectable creed, the Buddhists may be inherently grounded in the philosophy of Ahimsha and non-violence, but that doesn’t mean we are less human beings and thus less sentimental. The dishonorable precedent set by Keds would not only provoke Buddhist brothers and sisters, but it will also stir the sentiments of every sane religious practitioner of all the faiths in the world. As a self-efficacing and a humble Buddhist myself, I forewarn Keds not to tread on the dirty path lest it should face a similar consequence meted out to the culprits as cited in the above instances. While I beseech and implore to the brand vultures at the Keds not to hurt the sentiments of the millions of Buddhist the world over, I urge my fellow Buddhist and Tibetans, especially in America, to call it quits for all that Keds has to offer for you to cover up your ‘unholy’ feet with their ‘holy canvas shoes’!

I know there are many neighbors in our area that are opposed to this. It is interesting to note that there are many outlets to buy wine and beer in our area although the majority of them close relatively early. Walgreens is open until 12am and no doubt will do the overwhelming majority of business after Berkeley Bowl closes (between 8pm and 12am).

Our neighborhood has enough problems as it is and having late alcohol sales does not seem wise and just exposes us to more treacherous conditions.

Cindy Pascarella
Oregon St resident.

Supreme Angst

The Supreme Court ruling of yesterday that effectively stated there can be no banning of guns by the government doesn’t make me feel safer at night. It doesn’t reduce the anxiety I feel when stepping out my front door, either.

On the contrary, it is a ruling that raises my anxiety level. I am sure that many American citizens feel that way who, like I, will not be among the ones to start toting a firearm.

As we can see, George Bush, by his ultra conservative appointments to the Supreme Court, has left an indelible mark on the face of our country, and it isn’t a pretty one.

While I sympathize with people in high crime areas who would like to be able to protect themselves, I am sure that there must be a better way. I would rather leave it up to police and the military to do the gun carrying as they have had screening and training to do so, and are also held accountable for the consequences of their behavior.

By ruling that any citizen has a right to carry a gun, (or, for that matter, why not a machete or a grenade?) it makes every citizen subject to an all pervasive terrorization that we could be mortal victims of someone’s bad day.

There are numerous ways that a conscientious person can defend him- or herself including outwitting an enemy as opposed to the use of force. Allowing such a weapon into the hands of all citizens is unnecessary and it will lead to atrocities on our streets. It was not necessary for the Supreme Court to make this ruling.

Can Supreme Court judges be impeached? Or what is the procedure for removing a bad one from office?

Jack Bragen

Letters to the Editor

Tue Jun 29 14:40:00 -0700 2010

Walgreens Wants to Sell Beer and Wine; Supreme Angst; Wall Street Reform; Corporate Takeover; Take Down the Wall; Measure C Vote Explained; CEAC To Look at Restaurant Smoke; Obama Sacks McChrystal; Petraeus Replaces McChrystal; Think About It; Capitelli Letter; Obama’s War

Walgreens Wants to Sell Beer and Wine

I live on Oregon St near Berkeley Bowl and Walgreens.

I thought you might be interested to know that Walgreens attorneys are having an meeting tonight, June 29th, at the Shattuck Hotel at 7pm with neighbors (they’re only required to notify people within 1000ft of the store) regarding a request to sell beer and wine.

Wall Street Reform

Your Paper needs to drum into its readers’ heads the dire need for Wall Street REFORM - and support of our Government’s proposed legislation.

All of us need credit card and mortgage companies to be forced not to have hidden fees or pages and pages of fine print.

The legislation cracks down on predatory lenders looking to mislead people into taking on irresponsible debt.

Wall Street reform establishes an independent agency -- the Consumer Financial Protection Agency -- with one job: to protect consumers and enforce the new consumer financial protections, which would be the strongest ever enacted.

Finally, American taxpayers must never again be asked to bail out the big banks that are “too big to fail.”

Christine Malina-Maxwell

Corporate Takeover

We must stop the insidious and ubiquitous corporate take-over of our elected officials, as well as our elections.

Let’s overrule inhumane corporate greed with our unified power, intelligence and generosity toward one another.

Denise Bostrom

Wall Street Reform

...is needed now. To hell with these corporations running America. Small businesses are still the largest employers. Down with Wall Street and up with MAIN STREET!!! Give Obama whatever he needs!!...

Antonio Flores

Take Down the Wall

There is an economic wall in this country between those who have abused their positions on Wall Street for gain and those of us on the other side: the everyday citizens of our nation and the economy at large. That greedy wall is still crushing us. Wall Street Reform is desperately needed to stabilize our economy and help everyday people get back their homes, retire, and be able to send their kids to college. Small businesses and community banks that have integrity and play by the rules should be able to thrive. We need consumer protection and no more bailing out of big banks who got us in this mess.

Barbara Lubicz
Measure C Vote Explained

Measure C went down in flames not because of a secret cabal of hidden republican-ism in Berkeley but because the “progressive” groupthink that dominates Berkeley politics can’t do simple math. They wrote a mathematically inept bond and then attributed the failure to a political party that doesn’t exist in the City.

The math clearly states (as a previous editorial elaborates) that only 5% of residents are registered under the party of doom. The rest are Democrats or “other.” The other parties usually assign the traditional Democratic Party the title of “fascist” anyway...

What it sounds like is a total failure of the Berkeley Democratic Party to rally their own troops.

Or maybe a minority of the Democrats, Libertarians, Peace and Freedoms, Greens et al actually saw how BADLY this measure was written by the dunces at City Hall and canned the measure on its own merits.

Kriss Worthington, the Mayor and the others need to stop trying to find hidden bogeymen and acknowledge the fact that they are politically lazy and act entitled. Ingenuity is needed in these economically devastating times- I suggest they dredge it up next go-around.

Justin Lee

CEAC To Look at Restaurant Smoke

The City of Berkeley Community Environmental Advisory Commission will be looking into the issue of food smoke from small restaurants (under 400 lbs. of meat/week) and would like to hear from members of the community: those affected by smoke from restaurants, owners and managers of small restaurants, and any other stakeholders.

Please join us on Thursday, July 1 from 7-9PM at 2118 Milvia Street, 1st floor. Contact Nabil Al-Hadithy or (510) 981-7461.

Greg Leventis
Chair
Community Environmental Advisory Commission

Obama Sacks McChrystal

I applaud Obama’s sacking of Gen. McChrystal. We don’t need a cowboy with no respect for civilian control of the military running the show in Afghanistan. However, little mention is made in the media about his active role in creating the impression that running the show in Afghanistan. However, Chrystal. We don’t need a cowboy with no small restaurants, and any other stakeholders.

McChrystal was also involved in a scandal involving detainee abuse and torture at Camp Nama in Iraq. According to a report by Human Rights Watch, prisoners at the camp were subjected to abuse, including stress positions and being dragged naked through the mud. McChrystal was not disciplined in the scandal, even though an interrogator at the camp reported seeing him inspect the prison multiple times.

Why did the media and Congress give him a pass during his confirmation hearings? Instead, he was sent to run the war in Afghanistan.

Ralph E. Stone

Petraeus Replaces McChrystal

When will the U.S. finally concede that the Afghanistan war is unwinnable no matter what general is in charge? We are and always will be an occupation force resented by the local populace. The U.S cannot force change. We imposed a corrupt, unpopular Karzai government on the country. Change will only come from within, but not by a Karzai-led government. We are only fighting Taliban tentacles in Afghanistan while the head is located in remote parts of Pakistan, an unreliable ally. Meanwhile we are sacrificing precious lives and wasting billions of dollars. As the late Senator George Aiken said to Lyndon Johnson about the Vietnam war, “You must declare victory, and get out [now].”

Judi Iranyi

Think About It

I wonder how many of the dedicated volunteers who helped saving a pelican from the deadly Gulf oil have other birds for dinner or at a local fast-food outlet.

They are not alone. Most people are appalled by the devastation of animal life by the Gulf oil spill, yet subsidize the systematic killing of other animals for their dinner table. They know that meat and dairy harm the environment and their family’s health, but compartmentalize this knowledge when shopping for food.

And it goes beyond dietary flaws. We tolerate the killing of innocent people when our government and media label them terrorists. We ignore the suffering and starvation of a billion people, except when our government and media tell us to care because an earthquake or tsunami has struck.

Our society would benefit greatly from more original thinkers, and our personal diet is a great place to start.

Harold Kunitz

Capitelli Letter

This letter is in response to that of Mr. Burnstein regarding the decision of Mr. Capitelli to reconsider introducing a resolution regarding the illegal blockade runners to Gaza starting a brouhaha with the Israelis which resulted in the death of 9 of the rioting blockade runners. The issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict are diverse, complex, long standing issues of international policy and, locally, controversial. Mr. Capitelli showed good judgment by withdrawing the divisive and factually inaccurate resolution from consideration by the Berkeley City Council. The people of Berkeley are best served by having their elected officials focus on the issues that might improve Berkeley, rather making poorly considered foreign policy statements.

Once upon a time, Palestinians were known for hijacking planes. Now it seems that the Palestinians and they and their terribly naive apologists have switched to hijacking the political agendas and priorities of others. Perhaps Mr. Burnstein, not everyone in Berkeley WANTS to have these particular opinions inflicted upon them, like it or not, as a matter of city policy.

Rafael Moshe

Obama’s War

Obama basically continued with Bush’s policies. Let’s be blunt about this. In Afghanistan, he went beyond Bush. He escalated the war. He went along with this policy of the surge. And he ordered more drone attacks on civilians in Pakistan in his one year in office than Bush had done during his last term. So, for the people of that region, Obama’s presidency has been a total disaster. And it’s not working.

They have a puppet leader, Karzai, who’s developing his own sort of dynamic, because he’s grown very wealthy through corruption and thinks that he has genuine support.

One man’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter, and what some governments consider potential terrorists are simply those who don’t agree with government policies.

And the ones who are saying that this is
an unwinnable war are absolutely right. It’s a stalemated war. They can’t win it unless they destroy half the population of the country. So that is what people see. And then, why are they surprised that people are so hostile to the United States in that part of the world?

Ted Rudow III, MA

Columnists

Dispatches from the Edge: The Guns of August in the Middle East?

By Conn Hallinan
Tue Jun 29 12:22:00 -0700 2010

Crazy talk about the Middle East seems to be escalating, backed up by some pretty ominous military deployments. First, the department of scary statements:

First up, Shabtai Shavit, former chief of the Israeli spy agency Mossad, speaking June 21 at Bar Ilan University, Tel Aviv on why Israel should launch a pre-emptive strike at Iran: “I am of the opinion that, since there is an ongoing war, since the threat is permanent, since the intention of the enemy in this case is to annihilate you, the right doctrine is one of presumption and not retaliation.”

Second up, Uzi Arad, Israeli prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s national security advisor, speaking before the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem June 22 on his belief that the “international community” would support an Israeli strike at Iran: “I don’t see anyone who questions the legality of this or the legitimacy.”

Third up, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi speaking to reporters at the G-8 meeting in Toronto June 26: “I am not guaranteeing a peaceful production of nuclear power [so] the members of the G-8 are worried and believe absolutely that Israel will probably react preemptively.”

Fourth up, Central Intelligence Director Leon Panetta predicting on ABC’s “This Week” program June 27 that Iran could have two nuclear weapons by 2012: “We think they [Iran] have enough high-enriched uranium for two weapons...and while there is continuing debate [within Iran] right now about whether or not they ought to proceed with a bomb...they clearly are developing their nuclear capacity.” He went on to say that the U.S. is sharing intelligence with Israelis and that Tel Aviv is “willing to give us the room to be able to try to change Iran diplomatically and culturally and politically.”

A few points:
1) Iran and Israel are not at war, a fact Shavit seems confused about.
2) Since the recent rounds of sanctions aimed at Iran would have lost in the United Nations General Assembly, it unclear who Arad thinks is the “international community.”
3) Berlusconi is a bit of a loose cannon, but he is tight with the Israelis.
4) An Iran that is different “diplomatically and culturally and politically” sounds an awful lot like “regime change.” Is that the “room” Panetta is talking about?
And it isn’t all talk.

Following up the London Times report that Saudi Arabia had given Israel permission to fly through Saudi airspace to attack Iran, the Jerusalem Post, the Islam Times and the Iranian news agency Fars report that the Israeli air force has stockpiled equipment in the Saudi desert near Jordan.

According to the Post supplies were unloaded June 18 and 19 outside the Saudi city of Tabuk, and all civilian flights into the area were canceled during the two day period. The Post said that an “anonymous American defense official” claimed that Mossad chief Meir Dagan was the contact man with Saudi Arabia and had briefed Netanyahu on the plans.

The Gulf Daily News reported June 26 that Israel has moved warplanes to Georgia and Azerbaijan, which would greatly shorten the distance Israeli planes would have to fly to attack targets in northern Iran.

The U.S currently has two aircraft carriers-the Truman and the Eisenhower-plus more than a dozen support vessels in the Gulf of Hormuz, the strategic choke point leading into the Gulf of Iran.

The Saudis have vigorously denied the reports they are aiding the Israelis, and Shafeeq Ghabra, president of the American University of Kuwait, says “It would be impossible for the Saudis to allow an Israeli attack on Iran.”

But Ephraim Inbar, director of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies in Ramat Gan, Israel, argues that Saudi Arabia and Israel both fear a nuclear-armed Iran. “This brings us together on a strategic level in that we have common interests. Since the Arab world and Saudi Arabia understand that President Obama is a weak person, maybe they decided to facilitate this happening.” He also said the story might not be true because “I don’t think the Saudis want to burden themselves with this kind of cooperation with Israel.”

According to military historian Martin van Creveld, a professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, “The real fear is that someone will get carried away by his own rhetoric and fear mongering” and start a war. He also thinks, however, that Israel should not take a preemptive strike “off the table.”

Trita Parsi of the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington argues that the escalation of rhetoric is dangerous. “When you have that kind of political environment, you are leaving yourself no space to find another solution,” she told the Christian Science Monitor. “You may very well end up in a situation where you are propelled to act, even though you understand it is an unwise action, but [do so] for political reasons.”

The rhetoric is getting steamy, the weapons are moving into position, and it is beginning to feel like “The Guns of August” in the Middle East.

Senior Power: BPL, Wherefore Art Thous?

By Helen Rippier Wheeler
Tue Jun 29 12:50:00 -0700 2010


I had watched and listened (Channel #33) as he did a courageous and articulate job, trying to get Council’s attention, ultimately being turned off. All the while gnashing my feminist, age-affirming teeth (and I have all of them.) I had already discovered that the power structure that sustains the BOLT (City of Berkeley Board of Library Trustees) eschews the presence on the Board, or among the public attending meetings, of professional librarians experienced with buildings and collection development.

When I studied the proposed plan posted outside the North Branch library, I was stunned! I could not believe my eyes (yes, they’re good too)- no consideration whatsoever for the several specialized collections already existing at North but which have been constrained to such small spaces that I, foolishly it seems, assumed that they would flourish as a result of the renovation.

Yes, I am concerned first and foremost
with space for collections - mainly books and other printed materials. At North there is already recognition of the need for some of them. There are ‘starter’ spaces containing relatively few (no new adds) volumes of LARGE PRINT books in all genres, so called reference books (reference collection recently shrunk!), mysteries, books-in-Japanese, science fiction, New Books, LINK books, folios, ad infinitum. I foolishly anticipated provision designated for their continuance plus expansion. The shelving of the traditional (basic) fiction and nonfiction collections are already “tight.”

And Warfield recognizes so well the speciousness, the historical dichotomy of a public library efficiently functioning with a one-for-all reference-service-circulation-information ‘desk.’ Ridiculous.

So what does this all have to do with senior citizens (and residents of North Berkeley)? For starters, there are two senior citizens’ housing projects and one senior center within walking or a quick bus-ride distance.

Many elders prefer North because they can park there, with or without a placard; there is an albeit limited LARGE PRINT books collection; they grew up there; they are comfy with the accessible, visible professional librarian seated at his/her Information desk that has an available seat right next to it; they aren’t necessarily computer-literate, etc.

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What a thrill to turn on the California TV channel and see and hear -- ‘live’ -- the Legislature honor Phyllis Lyon. It was the California Legislative LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) Caucus Awards Ceremony. Lesbian Activist Del Martin (1921-2008), with partner Phyllis Lyon, formed Daughters of Bilitis, one of the first lesbian organizations in the United States.

On Monday June 14, 2010, the California Legislative LGBT Caucus hosted a special awards ceremony. The Legislature proclaimed June 2010 as LGBT Pride Month and celebrated the LGBT Community’s past accomplishments and contributions. The Assembly also honored LGBT individuals selected from across the state for their lifetime contributions and accomplishments in creating a better future for California and the United States. Sacramento’s Tina Reynolds, co-founder of Equality Action Now and long-time activist, was chosen to receive a lifetime achievement award along with other noted honorees.

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Departures (Okuribito) is a Japanese film rated PG-13 “for thematic material.” It is loosely based on Aoki Shinmon’s autobiographical book, Coffinman: The journal of a Buddhist Mortician. Death is a taboo subject in Japan.

Okuribito, as I’ll refer to it, won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film at the 2009 Oscars. The dvd is in public libraries’ collections. The optional English subtitles are exceedingly well-done, whole-heartedly capturing the meaning behind the words, as well as in “good” English.

Combine incredible scenic background (photographed in Sakata, Yamagata prefecture in northern Japan, on the Sea of Japan) and music by Joe Hisaishi, and you get 131 minutes of pure tenderness involving several elders. I especially like the Christmas Eve scene.

Briefly, plotwise, Daigo Kobayashi is a cellist in a symphony orchestra that has been dissolved. His mother had left him her house; his father had abandoned the family but not before imbibing his son with a love of music, especially the cello. He decides to move back to his old hometown. Spouse Mika understands; she verges on, but is not quite passive. He answers a classified ad titled ‘Departures’ thinking it an advertisement for a travel agency, and discovers that the job is actually for a ‘Nokanshi’ or ‘encoffineer,’ a funeral professional who prepares bodies for burial and entry into the next life.

Okuribito means a “sending person”. The English title, Departures, is opposite in perspective. The movie is about those who survive after a beloved’s departure. While his wife and others have nothing but contempt for the job, Daigo takes a certain pride in his work and begins to perfect the art, acting as a gentle gatekeeper between life and death, between the departed and the family of the departed. My Japanese friend says, “I liked the movie, although many criticize it’s too sentimental. Death is emotional, but not necessarily sentimental.”

“Best” Awards of the Japanese Academy, 2009 were in every category -- actor, cinematography, director, editing, film, lighting, screenplay, sound. Best supporting actor was Tsutomu Yamazaki as Ikuie Sasaki, the old man who is Daigo’s new employer and mentor. Best supporting female acting was Kimiko Yo as Yuriko Kamimura, as the empathetic NK Agency employee.

If you like tenderness with strength, especially when the aged are involved, you will enjoy Okuribito aka Departures.

Helen Rippier Wheeler can be reached at pen136@dlsextreme.com

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Blogbeat: Civic Sustainability: Scouring the Web for interesting tidbits

By Thomas Lord
Tue Jun 29 13:48:00 -0700 2010

This week’s items: An online twist to OPD’s riot preparations; shootings at funerals and memorials; school bond fails in Alameda: heads up Berkeley?; a correction to last week’s column

Is No News Good News?

Once upon a time it was one of the main functions of news to report to citizens about the actions of their government. Today, that situation may be reversing: “news” taking on the function of reporting about citizens to their government. Some background and then a case in point:

News reporting in Berkeley and Alameda County generally has suffered badly in recent years as papers fail or cut back. The long story made short: there are far fewer reporters out there actually digging up the news, and fewer widely read outlets for delivering that news.

Many have argued that citizen journalism and the blogosphere and social networks will replace the newsroom, perhaps even prove to be superior. It’s a nice theory but if you look at the attempts to realize it in Berkeley you’ll get the impression that the main news in town is restaurant and theater reviews and friendly interviews with local celebrities. Will you find a detailed, fact based analysis of Berkeley’s budget woes? Careful examinations of governance, budget, and bond issues affecting the school system? Not so much.

Without the scrutiny of the press, our civic leaders and our government are free to work indifferently to the will of the people from whom their authority is legitimately derived. Thomas Jefferson said something along those lines, many times.

Even more slippery is that, these days, “news” is changing meaning. To users of Facebook, for example, the news (what they call a “newsfeed”) is naught but the latest whimsical comments posted by officially registered “friends”.

As we chat distractedly on the social networks, creating so-called “news” for one another, the civic role of news is being flipped
Menard: “However most of us were less than satisfied with the answers we got last night from all the public officials about the gang displacement, the city deciding to not enforce the memorial policy, police staffing levels, and budgeting.” (emphasis added; see this).

Are the memorials really the problem? Is enforcing against them an effective use of police resources? In that conversation it proved nearly impossible to bring those questions to the fore. A journalistic report, even though brief, suggests that they are important questions. The BayCitizen report by Shoshana Walter suggests otherwise (see). “It’s a macabre trend: In Oakland and Richmond, young gunmen are targeting funerals and memorial services to attack friends and relatives of slain victims, the police and community leaders say.” Her article does mention the killing of Rachael Green but also several other retributive shootings that took place at funerals, not street shrines. If this is any indication, perhaps it is not the form of mourning or even the act of morning that is the problem.

While on the one hand our substitutes for actual news give government a better opportunity to watch us than for us to watch government, on the other hand, when we read what today passes as news and form opinions - we lack the information to form sound opinions. Jefferson’s “force of public opinion [which can not be] resisted” blows with the wind of rumor and innuendo.

Heads Up BUSD

Jefferson waxed eloquent about the value of the press but we ought not overlook something else he said in the same breath: “The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them.” (emphasis added).

If it is important to deliver independent and well developed news to the people, it is no less important that they should be able to read and understand it. As our newspapers are failing, so too our schools.

It is widely reported that a large ballot measure to sure up Berkeley schools is coming to the ballot in November. Is this an effective strategy? Perhaps of some concern is the recent failure of a similar measure in Alameda. BayCitizen reports: “And in the somber moments that followed the announcement of the preliminary vote, the board okayed agreements with two unions to furlough staff and teachers.”

The web site “The Island” - a rare, promising adventure in online journalism - has a fuller account of the grim details. (See)

Slowing Down the PACE

Beyond an educated an informed citizenry, our civic order depends on a strong, opportunity rich economy and, as we increasingly see, on sound energy and environmental policies. In those areas, Berkeley was seen as a leader with PACE. In Berkeley, the initial PACE experiment allowed homeowners to borrow money for solar installations, billing loan repayments as increases in property taxations to those properties. The notion was that the program would be self funding and that homeowners would quickly enjoy savings on their energy bills.

Now there is a snag. As reported on grist.org, a blog focussed on environmental news, Freddie Mac recently sent out a warning to lenders that their borrowers may not be entitled to receive PACE money because it would create a lien on the property that is superior (gets paid ahead of, if only one can be paid) to the outstanding mortgage. Environmentalists are scratching their heads and waiting for further clarification about the letter but tentatively conclude that it would exclude roughly half of all mortgaged homes from PACE programs.

Can We Keep This Up?

This has been a dismal column to write: the failure of any pretense of a well informed community, the rise of government surveillance in lieu of news, the inflaming of rumor and innuendo as the basis of public influence over government policy, further evidence of the failure of our schools, and even our best intentioned economic development and environmental sustainability projects called into question. Its grim from top to bottom.

There’s an old joke in the news business, I hear: “If it bleeds it leads.” - dark news “sells” better. It doesn’t sit well with me to leave it at that, though, and so next week, knock on wood, I’ll look for good and encouraging news.

Do be in touch: you can write me at lord@emf.net

But before you go, I must make a correction from last week!

BP Did NOT Fund Biofuel Breakthrough

Last week I reported on an incremental but potentially quite nice advance in synthetic biology that can help lead to replacing
fossil fuels with biofuels on a massive scale. I reported that this research at JBEI had been funded by BP. This was not correct, although it wasn’t entirely misleading either. Here’s the scoop:

In response to the article I received a polite note from Mr. Lynn Yarris, a Senior Science Writer for Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. He kindly indicated that my science writing wasn’t too shabby but asked me to correct:

JBEI is not funded by BP - it is funded mainly by a grant from the federal Department of Energy.

I had apparently confused, he pointed out, JBEI with BP-funded EBI.

I stand corrected and apologize for getting that wrong.

That said, academic funding mechanisms and modes of organization are a peculiar thing. JBEI and EBI were created around the same time and in a coordinated fashion. As the Berkeley Daily Planet reported in 2007 “While the project is separate from the $500 million Energy Biosciences Institute (EBI) funded earlier this year by BP (the company once called British Petroleum), the newly funded Joint BioEnergy Institute (JBEI) features many of the same scientific players—and both are headed by Jay Keasling, a chemical engineering professor and entrepreneur. “

The research focus areas of EBI and JBEI are, by design, complementary according to a “PowerPoint Presentation” by Chris Somerville of EBI. One important reason to keep the accounting books of EBI and JBEI separate, as the same presentation indicates, is that BP has intellectual property rights to some of EBI’s work, but not JBEI’s.

My surmise is that I did err in describing the JBEI research as BP funded but would not be wrong to say it would not likely exist in its present form were it not for the presence of closely related BP money.

Nevertheless, the BP tie-in was not central to my points in that column and I’m happy to make the correction.

Dispatches From The Edge:
Turkey, the U.S, and Empire’s Twilight

By Conn Hallinan
Tue Jun 29 16:04:00 -0700 2010

When U.S. forces found themselves beset by a growing insurgency in Iraq following their lightning overthrow of Saddam Hus-sein, the most obvious parallel that came to mind was Vietnam: an occupying army, far from home, besieged by a shadowy foe. But Patrick Cockburn, the Independent’s (UK) ace Middle East reporter, suggested that the escalating chaos was more like the Boer War than the conflict in Southeast Asia.

It was a parallel that went past most Americans, very few of whom know anything about the short, savage turn of the century war between Dutch settlers and the British Empire in South Africa. But the analogy explains a great deal about the growing influence of a country like Turkey, and why Washington, despite its military power and economic clout, can no longer dominate regional and global politics.

Take the current tension in U.S. –Turkish relations around Iran and Israel.

The most common U.S. interpretation of the joint Turkish-Brazilian peace plan for Iran, as well as Ankara’s falling out with Israel over the latter’s assault on the Gaza flotilla, is that Turkey is “looking East.” Rationales run the gamut from rising Islamicism, to U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates’ explanation that the West alienated Turkey when it blocked Ankara from joining the European Union (EU).

While Turkey’s rise does indeed reflect internal developments in that country, its growing influence mirrors the ebb of American power, a consequence of the catastrophic policies Washington has followed in the Middle East and Central Asia.

From Ankara’s point of view, it is picking up the tab for the chaos in Iraq, the aggressive policies of the Israeli government, and the growing tensions around the Iranian nuclear program. As Sedat Laciner, director of the International Strategic Resource Center in Ankara, told the New York Times, “The Western countries do things and Turkey pays the bill.”

While the Cold War is over, argues Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, “a new global” order has yet to emerge. Until those “mechanisms” are in place, “it will therefore fall largely to nation-states to meet and create solutions for the global political, cultural, and economic turmoil.”

Davutoglu’s observation about a “new global” order is an implicit critique of a United Nations’ Security Council dominated by the veto power of the “Big Five”: the U.S., Britain, France, Russia and China. Increasingly countries like Turkey, Brazil and India are unhappy with the current setup, and either want a place at the table or a reduction of the Council’s power. The latest Iran sanctions passed 12 to 2 to 1 in the Council. They would have failed in the General Assembly.

Internally, Turkey is putting its house in order. It has returned the once all-powerful army — four coups in as many decades — to the barracks, shifted power away from Istanbul elites to central and eastern Turkey, eased up on domestic repression, and even begun coming to terms with its large Kurdish minority. Legislation before the parliament would allow Kurdish language television stations and establish a commission to fight discrimination.

Externally, Turkey is following what Davutoglu calls a “zero problem foreign policy.” It has buried the hatchet with Syria, and reached out to Iraq’s Kurds. Of the 1200 companies working in Iraq’s Kurdistan, half are Turkish, and cross border trade is projected to reach $20 billion this year. And the Kurds have something Ankara wants: 45 billion barrels in oil reserves and plentiful natural gas.

Turkey has expanded ties with Iran and worked closely with Russia on energy and trade. It has even tried to thaw relations with Armenia. It has mediated between Damascus and Tel Aviv, brokered peace talks between Sunnis and Shites in Iraq, and Serbians and Bosnians in the Balkans, and tried to reduce tension in the Caucasus. It has also opened 15 embassies in Africa and two in Latin America.

Its foreign policy is “multi-dimensional” says Davutoglu, which “means that good relations with Russia are not an alternative to relations with the EU,” an explicit repudiation of the zero-sum game diplomacy that characterized the Cold War.

Turkey’s ascendancy is partly a reflection of a political vacuum in the Middle East. The U.S.’s traditional allies in the region, like Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, are increasingly isolated, distracted by economic troubles, paranoid about internal opposition, and nervous about Iran.

This growing influence has not been well received by the U.S., particularly the recent deal to enrich Iran’s nuclear fuel. But from the Turks’ point of view, the nuclear compromise was an effort to ratchet down tensions in a volatile neighborhood. Turkey is no more in favor of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons than is the U.S., but as Laciner says, it also doesn’t “want another Iraq.”

Of course there is an element of self-interest here. Turkey gets 20 percent of its gas and oil from Iran, and Tehran is increasingly a valuable trading partner. Indeed, Turkey, Iran and Syria are considering forming a trade group that would also include Iraq.
Arts & Entertainment

Opera Review: Raves from a Low-Brow for SF Opera Die Walkure

By John A. McMullen II
Mon Jun 28 18:02:00 -0700 2010

This installation of Wagner's Ring Cycle told the Financial Times.

The world is not going to take the diktats of the powers that have run it for the past two or three hundred years,” political scientist Soli Ozel of Bilgi University in Istanbul.

Opera Review: Raves from a Low-Brow for SF Opera Die Walkure

What? Four and half hours at the Opera! Wagner? The Anti-Semitic? Nazi music with the corny parody of the Fat Lady with the Horned Helmet? How many cappuccini would I have to drink to stay awake? What could keep my attention for that long? How about an octet of sopranos parachuting onto the stage? How about lightning strikes and roaring thunderclouds on the diorama? Maybe a real ring of fire! You get it all at the War Memorial Opera House, and the voices are as spectacular as the stagecraft.

DIE WALKURE at SF OPERA is the best opera I've ever seen, excluding the romanticized memory of my first-time when my mom and pop took me to the Pittsburgh Opera to see Aida when I was 12. Five hours later, I departed into the SF midnight mist wide awake and totally regaled with the tale and artistry I'd witnessed.

This installation of Wagner's Ring Cycle is about the Valkyries who decide who will die in battle and who protect the heroes in battle or, when they fall, escort them to Valhalla; it translates as "choosers of the slain."

Wotan is the Zeus of the Norse pantheon, and Mark Delavan's rich baritone is godlike. He is the image of the captain of industry, directing destiny from his high rise office that is out of a Brecht play in black-and-white. He sings an extensive recitative that is part fascinating exposition, part confession that traces the legend of the ring and how he got into his current predicament of being blackmailed by his bourgeois wife Fricka (sung by German mezzo-soprano Janina Baechle) to betray his hero son Siegmund who he conceived in a dalliance with a mortal. I respect is lost for the gods, then it will be twilight time. Raganrok & cedid; the final destiny of the gods.

Wotan's confidant is his daughter Brunnhilde, the main Valkyrie, who is saddled with the conundrum of carrying out Wotan's will to abandon Siegmund in battle when every fiber of her conscience screams against it. It's a father/daughter play, a king v. heroine play not unlike Antigone, but a very psychologically complicated play. It's a play about war, about destiny and defying the gods. It's about forbidden love, loyalty, and incest. It's Olympus delivered by Freud.

When Delavan sings Wotan, you can really appreciate the German language since his fach (i.e., the range he sings in) is closest to a speaking voice which makes the lyrics very intelligible. I never had much exposure to German; growing up, I heard Polish, Slovak, Italian, Greek, even Arabic, but little German unless you count a little Yiddish. My Italian mom always decried it as a guttural language. But lately I have been listening to it, and it is wondrously expressive, lyrical, and almost otherworldly. It's the language that Freud and Einstein thought and dreamed in. And after all, English is a Germanic language.

British tenor Christopher Ventris is our Siegmund, and the clarity and brightness of his voice with his good looks and barrel-chested manliness makes him a hero to root for. Matching him is the prima donna of the Dutch opera Eva-Maria Westbroek as Sieglinde, his "split-apart" long-lost twin-sister, with her buxom blonde earth-mother physicality and ethereal voice. The pairing makes us appreciate their magnetic if forbidden attraction.

Brunnhilde is the title's heroine: Die Walkure translates as The Valkyrie. (There are nine Valkyries, and eight sopranos singing backup to her is a sound to behold; each of the eight is good enough to be singing.
the leads in other Ring productions in a few years.)

Nina Stemme as Brunnhilde is the reason for people who love great voices to spend the money. A diminutive woman dressed in corporate business wear, she has a voice as big as Valhalla; with that echo-y Wagnerian dramatic soprano full of overtones and dignity, it seems a voice that comes from a supernatural creature.

Raymond Aceto sings the role of Hunding, the rough-hewn, abusive, possessive husband of Sieglinde from an arranged marriage. Aceto is a Vin Diesel look-alike with a bass voice that should be the example in the dictionary next to the definition of “bass voice.” He plays the villain to hilt, and we hate him instantly. Good stuff.

I haven’t seen opera in Italy, but the sets at the SF Opera take my breath away with four separate sets with completely different moods and modes.

The projections during the overture set the tone with a full stage video of the billowing waves of the cold blue sea that dissolve into a mesmerizing whirlpool right out of The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari. The looming clouds give way to run through the forest primeval seen through the eyes of an animal or someone in an altered state of consciousness. It leads us to the rustic cabin of Hunding and a real fire on an outside hearth. The cabin breaks away to show deer heads mounted on the wall and an ash tree growing up through the middle of the cabin. Protruding from the tree is the Enchanted Sword that only the hero can withdraw. (I learned a lot about where other myths came from through this opera—though sometimes I had to push away thoughts of The Lord of the Rings.) Then the sides of the cabin spread to encompass a breathtaking sky with a 50 foot moon to frame the reunited siblings/lovers. The side and down lighting lends the effects you see in 1940’s films with dramatic half-lit faces.

The sky is the centerpiece throughout: incredible thunderheads, sunsets and rises that Belasco would have applauded, and lighting strikes; all stir the blood. It gives us that picture of the man on the mountain—top with the roiling sky as his background, setting himself against the gathering storm, ready to stand against Fate and the Gods, to bear the Sturm und Drang, and to prevail.

This picture is the essence of the Romantic movement as defined as “the love of tragedy”: you know you’re going to lose, but you go down fighting with your dignity and defiance intact.

The war scene happens under a post-apocalyptic freeway, but Act Four is Valhalla featuring the monolithic ramps of a transcendent Edward Gordon Craig-like design with the extraordinary finale of a real Ring of Fire (this time I had to push away thoughts of Johnny Cash—I am such a low-brow).

Director Francesca Zambello gets lots of acting from the singers during their “extended moments” when they have to keep up the emotional connection through long passages of musical interlude. She also gets them to hit their marks to make the most out of the theatrical lighting effects.

Donald Runnicles came back to conduct, and the audience cheered him lovingly.

Emotionally, I think I responded with my head more than my heart until the final scene in Valhalla, but that might have been the tempi of the score or my being boggled with the wonderment of the thrill-ride.

There were only 100 tickets left for this season’s final performance June 30 on Saturday when I wrote this, but it will come around again next summer when they reprise the entire Ring Cycle. However, if you can get in this Wednesday night, carpe diem (or, more appropriately, Nutzen Sie den Tag). You will remember this one for a long time.

**DIE WALKURE** by Richard Wagner at the San Francisco Opera War Memorial Opera House, 301 Van Ness St. at Grove. Tickets/Info www.sfopera.org or (415) 864-3330.

PRODUCTION NEW TO SAN FRANCISCO

Final performance June 30 at 7:00 pm; to be reprised in Summer 2011

Co-production with Washington National Opera

Libretto by the composer

Approximate running time: four hours and 30 minutes, with two intermissions

Sung in German with English supertitles

Conducted by Donald Runnicles, direction by Francesca Zambello with associate direction by Christian Rath, set design by Michael Yeargan, costume design by Catherine Zuber, choreography by Lawrence Pech, projection design by Jan Hartley, and lighting design by Mark McCullough.

WITH: Nina Stemme, Eva-Maria Westbroek, Janina Baechle, Christopher Ventris, Mark Delavan, Raymond Aceto, Wendy Bryn Harmer, Tamara Wapinsky, Molly Fillmore, Daveda Karanas, Priti Gandhi, Maya Lahyani, Pamela Dillard, and Suzanne Hendrix.

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American Theatre Critics Association, and this is his first opera review. Comments to EyeFromTheAisle@gmail.com

**Theatre Review: SPEECH & DEBATE at Aurora**

By John A. McMullen II.

Tue Jun 29 10:47:00 -0700 2010

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**David Allen**

Maro Guevara) Jayne Deely, and Jason Frank take a dance break in SPEECH & DEBATE.

Please O please O please, people! There is a reason for the theatrical convention of two acts separated by an intermission. When half of your audience has white hair and tricky bladders, you have a little break after about 55 minutes for a little potty time, a little drinky-poo, a cookie, a chat, then back in for another 45. Unless you are going to deliver a chock-a-block thrilling ninety minutes tops, dispense with the NO INTERMISSION FOR AN HOUR AND FORTY FIVE MINUTES which is how long this pointless play runs.

There were three thrills in SPEECH AND DEBATE at the Aurora Theatre—they were the two musical and one dance number which lasted about 10 minutes combined. If only they could have reversed the time of endless yakking with the very entertaining singing and dancing, it would have then been worth the price of admission.

Other than that, it was like sitting through three and a half episodes of Saved by the Bell. Worse, it seemed like it was written BY a high school student. They have good
young actors whose talent was wasted on this meatless, pointless script perhaps worthy of an after-school teenage special. To further bolster my viewpoint, consider that Entertainment Weekly, our national arbiter of shlock, hailed it as one of the 10 best plays of last season.

Ripped from the headlines, it is a story about right-wing politicians and teachers who are “chicken-hawks” (i.e., older males who prefer and prey on teenage boys near or just over the age of consent) and sexual blackmail. When Law and Order: SVU has done this storyline to death, it’s time to run in the other direction.

Nevertheless, the actors entertain us. Jayne Deely is a talent to be reckoned with, and delights us with several long monologues of believable adolescent loopiness. She plays Diwata, an annoyingly hyper-active actress-wanna-be who can never get cast by the high-school drama teacher Mr. Healy, and vows a vendetta against him (and aren’t closeted high school drama teachers an easy and overdue target). When her blog is read by gay student Howie (Maro Guevara) who is out, he comments online that he’s had an IM sex chat with ol’ Mr. Healey the pederast, which the high school hot-shot reporter-wanna-be Solomon (Jason Frank) picks up on. Guevara has the dearly-desired ability of naturalness on stage, and is an actor to watch. Frank is young and a bit of a one-note samba, but with his good white-bread looks and more training, he’ll be seen again. Holli Hornlien has two cameos as teacher and reporter, and, while cameos are always a delight for seasoned talents, I always worry how much she'll be seen again. Hornlien is memorable in TheatreFIRST’s LOVE-PLAY.

Our heroine Diwata proceeds to extort the boys into joining the Speech and Debate club so she has somewhere to perform. They then have a mutual extortion-filled stand-off wherein secrets are outed while this warped triad tries to further their self-seeking goals. It really doesn’t seem to matter.

Mr. Healy never gets brought to heel. (Funny comment heard on the way out: “I couldn’t believe that a teacher would molest a student on school grounds. That just seemed so unrealistic!” Somebody save me from middle-class naivete.)

Abortion, teenage gay sex, teenage straight unprotected sex resulting in pregnancy resulting in abortion, adult hypocrisy, the inability to talk about real concerns in high school—give me a break! Is this the stuff of $45 per ticket mature theatre? Even on Gay Pride Weekend when my spirits are up, I couldn’t make excuses for this cheesy excuse for a play that reveals nothing that we didn’t know before, where laughs come from the actors’ sense of humor rather than from funny lines, and has no discernible resolution.

The set is spiffy with a paneled upscale classroom but the pointless projections of magazine ads and art had me scratching my head, and I can connect pretty much anything in my fetid imagination. But the set does a happy surprise and breaks away to colored and flashing lights for the treasured yet scant dance number.

Anyway, stay away. Unless you’re under 18. Funny, because, by my count, there were over 70 gray and bald heads in the audience of 120. A little embarrassing all around, but the audience stayed awake and laughed good-naturedly. However, there was a bathroom rush at the curtain.

SPEECH AND DEBATE at Aurora Theatre, 2081 Addison Street, Berkeley through July 18.

Tickets/info www.auroratheatre.org (510) 843-4822

Written by Stephen Karam, directed by Robin Stanton, musical composition and sound design by Chris Houston, musical direction by Billy Philadelphia, choreography by LiWen Ang, lighting by Kurt Landisman, and costumes by Callie Floor. Stage management by Angela Nostrand.

WITH: Maro Guevara, Holli Hornlien, Jayne Deely, and Jason Frank.

John McMullen is a member of SFBATCC and ATCA, and takes comments at EyeFromTheAisle@gmail.com

Reviews: Around and About...

By Ken Bullock
Tue Jun 29 11:32:00 -0700 2010

Aurora Theatre, Contra Costa Theater, Berkeley Symphony

Aurora Theatre’s production of ‘Speech and Debate,’ by Stephen Karam, provides the platform for some energized-and amusing-performances by three young actors: Jason Frank, Maro Guevara and-especially-Jayne Deely. As a gaggle of self-conscious high school misfits, trying to crack into an adult world—or its media simulation—they become an uncomfortable posse, with the intention to blow the cover on any number of adults who aren’t walking the walk—or each other-while showing off their talents, culminating in a series of funny production numbers for a presentation-cum-revue for their Speech and Debate club at school.

Robin Stanton directs. And Holli Hornlien, memorable in TheatreFIRST’s LOVE-PLAY a few years back, has a good turn as the only adult-rather, two: a bemused teacher at the start, and a canny, self-promoting journalist at the end of the play.

The song-and-dance parodies are the snapper. And where the limitations of a comedy that promises satire becomes apparent. Pioneer stand-up political comedian Mort Sahl—apparently now a Bay Area resident—made a fine distinction during the last national election between parody and satire. And too many of the plays we see nowadays at the repertory theaters (increasingly an ironic designation) are from the mill of parodies, which supply the sketch and sitcom TV markets. A never-ending Moebius Strip, I guess.

Through July 18.

Contra Costa Civic Theater serves up some relaxed summer entertainment for the whole family with its production of BARNUM-P, T., of “There’s a sucker born every minute”—at their theater on Pomona at Moeser Lane, El Cerrito, through July. A genial show which features an enthusiastic ensemble as circus folk, the story’s that of the romance between dreamer-and-bunko artist-Barnum (Derrick Silva) and his more practical wife. The highlight’s in the second half, with a wonderful production number, “Black and White,” in which Alexis Wong—featured in Ten Red Hen’s CLOWN BIBLE awhile back—doffs her red nose, and struts the stage in a sultry gown as a torch singer, belting out the number, a cautionary song to show people-turned-civilian, while Mrs. Barnum leads a church choir in mock-dignified counterpart, as Barnum himself tumbles through a gauntlet of factory work, on his way to a political career, before a return to his first love of huckstering. David Bogdonoff directed, with some great clowning by the ensemble, guided by Dan Griffths and the San Francisco Circus Center.

Joana Carneiro, music director of the Berkeley Symphony, was awarded the Helen M. Thompson award by the League of American Orchestras on June 18th, at the 65th annual convention of the League, in Atlanta.

When conductor laureate Kent Nagano presented the recent program of the Berkeley Akademie, May 20 at the First Congregational Church-he prefaced the show with a long, reflective string of remarks about the contemporary state of Classical Music,
introducing guest artist Jorg Widmann as the young heir of the Neo-Classical and Romantic tradition, as teacher, instrumentalist and composer.

Widmann made his own, very upbeat, remarks-and demonstrated his virtuosity as a clarinetist in the two pieces bracketing his composition. Beethoven’s Quintet in E-flat for Piano and Strings, Opus 16, and Mozart’s last great composition, the Clarinet Concerto in A, K. 622. His own piece, Versuch über die Fuge—“an attempt at a fugue”—proved an intense string quartet, with soprano Christine Brandes valiantly singing the text from the Vulgate of Ecclesiastes: Vanity, vanity, all is vanity. Widmann’s score, taut, exquisite-and humorous in its use of unusual sound-producing techniques (the string players swishing their bows and hissing, for one)—proved a remarkable setting in every sense for its subject, Vanitas.

A standing ovation ensued. But there was some controversy at intermission and after the concert. Not everyone had an ear for Widmann’s dissonance—or agreed with Nagano that his composition, at least, was in the tradition of the other composers on the program.

But Widmann—who mentioned the unusual dissonances in both Beethoven and Mozart, commenting: “They’re the true experimentalists!”—didn’t so much break with tradition as push the envelope a little bit further.

The theory of modern art begins just before and at the time of Mozart, when Denis Diderot and (separately) G. H. Lessing postulate the tableau—or “the moment pregnant,” as Lessing put it—for all representational and spectacular arts. Mozart and Da Ponte discovered an equivalent to this in the musical theater shortly after in their operas—and in The Magic Flute.

Roland Barthes wrote, in the 70s, how the limit of the tableau, based on an idealization of the proportions of the human body, finds its limit only in mortality. And Widmann—imishly in his Con brio, earlier this year at Berkeley Symphony, more elegiacally in Versuch-accentuates the old masters’ frameworks to an extreme, producing exquisite pleasure for some—and for others, pain ...

But there’s a definition of modern poetry as the sound of inherent contradiction in language liberated, like fingernails on a window pane when first heard. And there was more than a little bit of poetry to Widmann’s setting of the spare sternness and cutting irony of Ecclesiastes.

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**Events**

**Honoring the Life and Legacy of David Brower, July 1, 2010**

**Mon Jun 28 14:00:00 -0700 2010**

July 1, 2010 is the official David Brower Day, honoring firebrand environmentalist and community activist of the same name. David Brower is considered by many to be the father of the modern environmental movement. With a vision and influence equaled in the last century only by Rachel Carson and Jacques Cousteau, David Brower created a legacy of activism which focused on the interconnectedness of the world around us. Brower had an unmatched talent for articulating what we were doing to our planet, and the urgent need for remedial action. Brower’s message and vision made the environmental movement part of our day-to-day lives and led thousands of activists across many generations to put the Earth first.

David Brower holds a long list of accomplishments throughout his life as an activist. Among many of his accomplishments, Brower served as the first executive director of the Sierra Club from 1952-1969 and is largely credited with increasing the organization’s membership. By the end of his tenure, the Sierra Club had become the nation’s leading environmental membership organization. Brower later founded Friends of the Earth (www.foe.org), a worldwide environmental network now active throughout the world, co-founded the League of Conservation Voters, the nation’s leading environmental political action group, and founded Earth Island Institute in 1982. Brower was also instrumental to the success of many environmental campaigns, including the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964, which protects millions of acres of public lands in pristine condition. Brower died in his Berkeley home in late 2000.

Eighty-eight years of courageous activism shaped Brower one of the most successful environmental advocates of our time. As a way of celebrating the accomplishments of the local boy turned environmental activist, the City of Berkeley in 2000 sanctioned July 1st as the official “David Brower Day”.

In honor of David Brower’s legacy, the David Brower Center will collaborate with youth from the South Berkeley YMCA and Berkeley City Council Members in Berkeley on July 1st for a non-public event.

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**Arts & Events Listings**

**Classical Music-East Bay Through July 11**

**Tue Jun 29 14:21:00 -0700 2010**

**CRANEWAY PAVILION**

Oakland East Bay Symphony, July 3, 6:30-10 p.m. Celebrate Independence Day with a patriotic program of music and fireworks. Program also features Khalil Shaheed and Oaktown Jazz Workshops and the Hilltop Community Church Choir. Free. www.oeb.org.


**Fourth Of July-East Bay Through July 11**

**Tue Jun 29 15:40:00 -0700 2010**

**BERKELEY MARINA**


**BLACK DIAMOND MINES REGIONAL PRESERVE** Originally the home of several Native American tribes, white men began coal mining in the area in the 1860s. The preserve today features old mines and displays of the history of the area.

“Fireworks with a View,” July 4, 7-10:30 p.m. Avoid the crowds and view the fireworks over the Delta and learn about the historic Independence Day celebrations in 19th century Somersville. Registration required.

Free unless otherwise noted; $5 seasonal parking fee on weekends. Daily, 8 a.m. to dusk Somersville Road, about five miles south of state Highway 4, Antioch. Information: (925) 757-2620, Tickets: (925) 555-1212, www.ebparks.org.<

**YOSHI’S**

“Yoshi’s Fourth of July weekend Blues Festival,” through July 3, 8 and 10 p.m. With Chris Thomas King on Jul. 1 and James Cotton Superharp Band Jul. 2 and 3. $16-$24.

Shows are Monday through Saturday, 8 and 10 p.m.; Sunday, 2 and 7 p.m., unless otherwise noted. 510 Embarcadero West, Oakland. (510) 238-9200, www.yoshis.com.<