
JOHN GEORGE DEMOCRATIC CLUB NEWSLETTER

March, 2007

**John George
Art/Essay Contest
Award
Saturday,
May 12
West Oakland
Library
1801 Adeline St.
11 AM - 1 PM**

**This year's theme is "How
can violence be stopped in
Oakland?"**

Middle and high school students are asked to write an essay on the topic, "How can violence be stopped in Oakland?" Include in your essay: (a) one thing young people including yourself can do to stop violence and (b) what adults can do to stop violence. -- 500 words max.

Elementary school children are asked to draw a picture showing what a safe and comfortable school or neighborhood would look like so you can learn well (11 inch by 17 inch maximum size)



Kobe Harris, Gerald Lenoir (blocked in this photo), Larisa Casillas, Nunu Kidane, and Osagie Enabulele address the club

JG Forum on Immigration Hits Some Hot Buttons

The March 3 John George forum on immigration at the Prescott Joseph Center in West Oakland brought some great information and sparked some heated debate as an excellent panel struggled to find a just immigration policy.

Larisa Casillas from the Bay Area Immigrant Rights Coalition pointed out that in the Bay Area Latino immigrants are outnumbered by Asians, in spite of the stereotype. She also pointed out many injustices in the current law—for example, the law requires a Filipino family to wait 24 years to be united. Fees to obtain a green card are set to go from \$400 to \$900 while they were about \$40 twenty years ago.

Gerald Lenoir from the Black Alliance for Just Immigration argued that the unjust international economic system with laws such as NAFTA is

pushing people out of their homelands. He cited hotel workers in Los Angeles that recently included a provision requiring the hiring of African Americans in their predominantly latino workforce as a way to bring these communities together.

Nunu Kidane from the priority Africa Network said that the majority of the world's 200 million immigrants are in Africa. As an Eritrean she has had to learn what it means to live as a black person in the United States.

Professor Kobe Harris from San Jose State stirred the debate by taking issue with the assertion that globalization is the problem. He argued that, "Nigeria is better off because of Shell." Panelist Osagie Enabulele with Education Development Opportunities disagreed, saying that, as a Nigerian, he thinks Shell destroys because "environmental standards don't apply."



There's Gerald, but now Osagie is missing, oops. Next time I'll let Laurie take the pictures--JLF

Nunu Kidane summed up the heated discussion saying it "got my blood flowing." She said that the "issues are overwhelming" but that we need to "figure out a way for communities to come together."

Ed. note: The percentage of Nigerians living on less than \$1 per day has risen from 32% to 71% since 1985.—Harper's Index

Barbara Lee Responds to State of the Union

(Washington, DC) – Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D-Oakland) issued the following statement in response to President Bush's State of the Union address January 23rd:

"Tonight we saw a deeply unpopular President struggling to remain relevant and succeeding only in proving how out of touch he is with the American people.

"There are millions of Americans who don't have health insurance. The president has had six years to do something about that, and he's done nothing. Now he is proposing raising taxes on middle class Americans to fund a system that still leaves millions uninsured.

"Last year, just a week after saying that America is 'addicted to oil' in his State of the Union, the President sent Congress a budget that shortchanged the development of the alternative fuels and technologies needed to make America energy independent. He has had six years to do something about energy independence and global warming, and he's done nothing.

"He has had six years to act in a bipartisan fashion, and we know he hasn't done that.

"Tonight the President addressed a Democratic Congress, which was a direct result of people going to the polls to reject his failed policy in Iraq. Still, he continues to ignore the American people's mandate to end the war.

"He had an opportunity to tell us what he's going to do to end this occupation and bring our troops home, and his refusal to do so only highlights just how out of touch he is with the American people.

"He also had an opportunity to tell us what he is going to do to help the survivors of Katrina and to tackle the structural inequality, the endemic poverty, the negligence and the indifference that

turned a natural disaster into a human catastrophe. His failure to do that makes it clear how much work we, as members of Congress, have to do.

“Finally, our fight against the global AIDS pandemic is perhaps the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time. I am glad that the President mentioned our efforts to fight this disease, but the true test of his commitment will be reflected in his forthcoming budget request to Congress. I hope that he will agree with me on the need to provide \$7.69 billion for our Global AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria programs in the coming year.

On March 8 Barbara Lee introduced a bill calling for a six month timeframe for withdrawal. The bill was introduced as a direct challenge to the President’s attempt to escalate the war. Nancy Pelosi is advocating a timetable for withdrawal by mid- 2008, but conservative Democrats (and Republicans) may block this effort.



Sign at the January 27 anti-war march in SF

Visit to Nicaragua

By Robert Raich

I recently returned from a three-week trip to Central America, half of it in Nicaragua, which has now re-joined the coalition of progressive Latin American countries. I arrived just days before the inauguration of President Daniel Ortega, and evidence of the recent, spirited election was everywhere. An actual campaign poster is pictured [*below at left*].

Upon driving into Managua one could not miss the prevalence of brightly colored billboards promoting “*progreso, reconciliacion*” in the capital city, an area of diverse political factions. This struck me as indicative of a certain maturation of the Sandinista party as a political movement, or of the developing personal maturity of Daniel Ortega, the man. In areas of the country that are Sandinista strongholds, billboards with the same color scheme and typeface simply emanated thanks, touting the upcoming inauguration and featuring appreciative pictures of the new president and vice president. Meanwhile, in conservative cities such as Granada, there were no such billboards at all, though some signs of the recent election were still evident.

Although the mood of the people was ebullient and optimistic, there was no escaping the country’s difficulties and its troubled past. In the city of Masaya bullet holes still pock the walls of buildings around the town square, as grim remnants of the devastation wrought by the *contra* war.

In the city of Matagalpa a monument to a revolutionary hero and some carefully preserved military hardware serve as reminders of the vicinity’s troubled past. Politically, the area might be analogous to California — a largely “blue” region with a sizable minority of conservative political elements. Using that same analogy, the nearby town of San Ramon would be akin to the Berkeley/Oakland/San Francisco

area, with nearly 100% of the people supporting the Sandinistas, and the red and black Sandinista flag hanging ubiquitously from trees, poles, and structures of all sorts.

Gone is Daniel Ortega's *yanqui imperialista* rhetoric of the 1980's, replaced with a less confrontational message touting economic growth. Unfortunately, in a politically expedient move the Sandinistas made a deal with the devil by agreeing with the Catholic church to ban virtually all abortions in the country.



The privatization of the electrical system in recent years has proven to be an abysmal failure. The system was sold to a Spanish company more interested in maximizing its own profits than in providing reliable service, improving living conditions for the people, instilling confidence among investors, or promoting the country's economy. Power

outages can and do strike random areas unpredictably, without warning, and for uncertain duration. This commonly creates the miserable ripple effect of leaving people without *water* when there is no power to run water pumps. The good news is that since the Sandinistas' victory, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has promised to give Nicaragua cheap oil and several free power plants.

Threat of War with Iran

By Jack Lucero Fleck

A lot of us couldn't believe that the U.S. would really invade Iraq—a country that posed no threat to us and an action that would likely lead to the slaughter of thousands of soldiers and innocents. Millions of people around the world protested prior to the invasion but to no avail. President Bush and his cronies plunged mindlessly into a complete disaster.

Now, however, they are seriously contemplating an even a bigger quagmire—attacking Iran. Iran is much bigger (68 million population vs 25 million in Iraq), has a much longer history as a unified country (think Persia), and has a much stronger army than Saddam did after years of sanctions.

It is true that Iran is moving ahead with plans to make nuclear weapons. And it is true that the Mullahs ruling Iran are reactionaries. But the anti-apartheid movement against South Africa, also a reactionary regime, proved that worldwide pressure can be strong enough to bring about peaceful change.

Attacking Iran would be the worst possible choice for the U.S. Instead, as we did with South Africa, which was an established nuclear power, we should support democratic forces in Iran working against the reactionary government.

Recommended Books:

(Alona Clifton)

The Covenant – Introduction by Tavis Smiley (2006)

The Covenant with Black America is a national plan of action to address the primary concerns of African Americans today

In all the major areas of concern, African Americans suffer the highest disparities. The Covenant addresses 10 major areas of national concern for African Americans:

- Covenant I: Health Care
- Covenant II: Public Education
- Covenant III: Unequal Justice System
- Covenant IV: Community-Centered Policing
- Covenant V: Affordable Neighborhoods
- Covenant VI: Democracy
- Covenant VII: Rural Roots
- Covenant VIII: Good Jobs, Wealth, & Economic Prosperity
- Covenant IX: Environmental Justice
- Covenant X: Racial Digital Divide

The Covenant In Action – Forward by Tavis Smiley and Afterward by Cornel West (2006)

This is a companion to The Covenant. Its goal is to provide advocates that are willing to challenge the systems and institutions...and provides a toolkit to systematically take on the challenges identified in the Covenant.

There are organizations and communities across America that are using these two books to address some or all of the Covenants. BWOPA, Oakland/Berkeley Chapter is focusing on Covenants I and III.

2008 is a presidential year and one that promises to be very exciting with both a woman and a bi-racial man, who identifies as Black.

The Audacity of Hope – Barack Obama
Barak Obama is a presidential hopeful and a U.S. Senator. The book is about the Senator's vision for how America can reach its full potential. He uses his public service, family life and religious convictions as a backdrop. This is the Senator's second book. The first Book was [Dreams From My Father](#).

And One More book:

(Jack Lucero Fleck)

Hell and High Water – Joseph Romm
If *An Inconvenient Truth* wasn't enough to convince you that the world is on the brink of disaster, *Hell and High Water* will do the trick. We are headed at breakneck speed toward a carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere that will ensure melting of the polar ice caps. Imagine a world with every port under 80 feet of water—Tokyo, Shanghai, Calcutta, London, Buenos Aires, Havana, New York, Miami, Oakland! This is less than 100 years away. We have to act now and the book lays out what has to be done to cut carbon emissions—plug-in hybrid cars, conservation, an unprecedented international effort. Will we act in time?

Multiple Health Care Proposals Introduced in Sacramento: The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same?

By Laurie Soman

It appears to be the year for health care in our state's capital, with the introduction of multiple proposals for health care insurance expansion and more expected. Major proposals range from the all-inclusive single payer proposal by Sheila Kuehl that was vetoed by the Governor last year to a Republican plan to expand tax credits and Health Savings Accounts. All the plans include key concepts such as "shared responsibility" and expanded access to coverage; several are "Pay or Play" models in which employers are required to

spend a certain percentage of their payroll for employee health insurance or pay a fee to the state. Most of the plans would increase the income eligibility ceiling for the Healthy Families Program for low-income children to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (or about \$62,000 for a family of four) and would extend coverage to children regardless of their documentation status. Almost all proposals are still vague and awaiting details. For example, big question marks in many of the proposals concern adults who are not legal residents, as most of the proposals either explicitly exclude them or are silent. And, most of the proposals are based on expanding purchase of policies in existing health insurance plans, without addressing major issues such as costs or real access to appropriate health care providers and treatment. The major proposals include:

Governor's Health Care Proposal: Still a ten-page outline and not incorporated in a bill, the proposal is a mandatory insurance model similar to that enacted last year in Massachusetts. The Governor's plan would require all individuals in the state to have some kind of health insurance coverage, whether through public programs like Medi-Cal or Healthy Families (with the income ceiling increased to 300% of the Poverty Level). The proposal lacks details on almost all elements, including financing, although the Administration estimates a total cost of \$12 billion. As with the Massachusetts plan, the fundamental criticism of this proposal is that it would force uninsured individuals and families who are not eligible for public or subsidized coverage to purchase high-premium, low-benefit plans. Some employers even have suggested that it may be cheaper for them to exercise the "pay" option and pay the state in lieu of continuing health coverage they currently offer their employees.

SB 840 (Kuehl): Senator Sheila Kuehl has reintroduced her single payer bill, with the same bill number, from last year. Last year's version passed the Legislature but was vetoed, as

expected, by the Governor. Under this plan the state would establish a statewide, single payer model, universal health care system to be administered by a newly created state commission. The bill would cover all state residents and would require the new system to be implemented in approximately four years. Once implemented, the new statewide system would replace all health insurance plans and policies currently marketed in the state for coverage of the services that now would be provided by the state program. (A staff model system such as Kaiser could continue to function as an integrated medical group but not as a health plan.) The John George Democratic Club is on record supporting the single payer/universal coverage approach personified in Kuehl's bill.

SB 48 (Perata): State Senate President Don Perata has introduced his own health coverage plan. This proposal, still in its early stages, would create a system under which all legal resident adults who work in the state and their dependents would be required to have a minimum health coverage policy (with "minimum benefits" to be determined by MRMIB, the agency that administers the Healthy Families Program and several other insurance programs). The proposal would enforce "Pay or Play" for all employers with at least ten employees. Legal resident working adults and all children, regardless of their documentation status, would be covered up to 300% of the Poverty Level by either Medi-Cal or Healthy Families.

Assembly Speaker Nunez's Proposal: Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez has proposed a plan that would require insurance coverage for all working Californians, including part-time and seasonal workers who are employed in all but the smallest businesses and their dependents (via "Pay or Play"). All children, regardless of their residency status, would be covered up to 300% of the Poverty Level. The plan would extend coverage by 2012 to single, unemployed adults not currently eligible for any public program, an

element not present in other insurance expansion plans. The Speaker has introduced a placeholder bill for the plan, which, like most others, will require significant work on the details.

Republican “Cal CARE” Plan: State Republicans have introduced a plan dubbed “Cal CARE” that would expand access to coverage through standard Republican strategies such as tax credits and easier access to Health Savings Accounts (HSAs). This proposal was dead on arrival and will not be acted on by the Democrat-dominated Legislature.

We expect even more reform proposals, as numerous legislators have declared health care reform a priority. Aside from the Kuehl single payer bill, these proposals are likely to follow the basic outlines of those above-- using the existing insurance system to expand coverage for uninsured people. There may be action on expansion of children’s coverage this year, but many analysts believe it will take at least two years to negotiate any larger changes in the health care system. Meanwhile, advocates will be watching as Massachusetts implements its mandatory insurance model for lessons relevant to California, including the wisdom of building health expansion on an essentially broken private insurance system.

New Orleans Report

Feb. 21, 2007

Lorie Hill

The situation in New Orleans is much more dire than the media has been letting us know. There have been a few newspaper articles and special reports on TV, yet the reporting on the most major disaster in U.S. history has been noticeably skimpy.

I was in New Orleans for a week at the end of October, 2006, 14 months after the Gulf Coast was roughed up, and in many places devastated, by Hurricane Katrina, and then Rita. I was there

to assess the needs related to education, mental health, conflict resolution and violence prevention.

A little more than half of New Orleans' residents have returned since Hurricane Katrina. More residents are planning to and hoping to return. Many other aspects of life and basic necessities are still lacking. Many homes, churches, synagogues and other buildings have not yet been gutted, 1 1/2 years after Katrina. Until the buildings are gutted, mold continues to grow which makes people sick. Obviously, people cannot rebuild until buildings have been gutted. Many people in new Orleans still do not have electricity.

The state of Louisiana took over the New Orleans schools. That takeover makes the California takeover of the Oakland schools look mild. The state-appointed superintendent of the New Orleans schools only repaired and opened a few schools for kids to return in September, 2006. Residents warned the state administrator that more schools needed to be opened because more children and teenagers who had left because of Katrina were returning.

The state administrator stayed with her plan, only opening a few schools for September, 2006. The New Orleans residents had been correct. Many more students returned to New Orleans than the state administrator had expected. So the schools were terribly overcrowded.

They were also horribly understaffed, especially with regard to teachers. When the state took over New Orleans' schools, it fired many, many teachers who were credentialed, experienced and respected. My understanding is that the state of Louisiana broke, or nearly broke, the New Orleans's teachers' union. So that leads to a teacher shortage. At one school in October classes varied in size from 40 to 70 students per class with 1 teacher.

The high school gym had not been repaired. The

Superdome was repaired within a few months after Katrina. If the reason to repair the Superdome right after Katrina is that sports and fun are valuable for the city community, why wouldn't sports and fun be valuable for the high school community? If we can fix the enormous Superdome, how come we can't fix the small high school gym? Is this a lack of compassion ... and / or a lack of social and political will?

The whole city needs to be repaired and healed.

This includes the mental health system in New Orleans which is in bad shape...

- More than 300 psychiatry beds have been lost in New Orleans because of closed hospitals or psychiatric departments –

- Before the storm there were fewer than 900 deaths per month. Since the storm the death rate is about 1,300 deaths per month even though the city has only half the residents it used to have

- Suicides have been happening at 3 times the rate before the storm

- The city's health department has had a serious loss of staff, dropping from 300 people before the storm to about 60 people as of mid-January, 2007, while the need for services has increased ..

A school principal, Donald Jackson, said during a meeting, "We need counseling - for everybody, students, as well as administrators, teachers, staff because everyone has been traumatized ... everyone ... And we need conflict resolution .. for everyone .. "

Violence has increased in New Orleans .. when people are so traumatized, our ability to cope unravels quickly. New Orleans has historically had high levels of homicide .. and the homicide rates are higher now since Katrina ...

Many teenagers returned to New Orleans without family members to go to high school with their friends. These teenagers are living without the support of family members. Many parents and

family members of these teenagers want to return to New Orleans to live with their children, but have no place to live. They may also not have a job. So teenagers are lonely while parents are feeling guilty.

These conditions are continuing to create huge trauma for people in, returning to or wanting to return to New Orleans ...

As a group let's figure out how to take action.

Haiti Conference

By Walter Riley

The struggle for democracy continues in Haiti.

The new president does not have control of the bureaucracy since the department heads remain from the right wing coup organized by the United States. Groups and NGOs funded by the likes of the International Republican Institute still dominate the institutions of civil society. Political repression in the forms of armed violence, killings and political arrests occurs daily against grass root mass Lavalas activists. Lavalas remains the party of the masses in Haiti, yet many of its leaders are imprisoned. The tide of Lavalas still rises. Lavalas plans a conference in Haiti for the end of March with activists from all departments. Lavalas needs financial resources to bring all its activists to the conference. I appeal to you to help pay the transport for Lavalas members to attend this conference. We can help offset the power of rightwing money and coup supporters by giving to the mass movement of the people of Haiti.

Send your check to:

Walter Riley, 1440 Broadway, Suite 612,
Oakland, California 94612

with a memo note for Lavalas conference. All monies will be sent to Haiti for the Lavalas conference.

Thank you for your support and call or email any thoughts.

In Memoriam



Thanks to MGO Newsletter for this Photo of Susan Duncan

Susan Duncan, a long time John George Democratic Club and steering committee member passed away on January 13. She had served for many years on the Peralta College Board of Trustees, was past president of the league of Women Voters, was active in Nuclear Free Oakland and was on the Chabot Space & Science Center advisory council. We'll miss her, and we thank Susan for her integrity and her commitment to bringing a brighter future to coming generations.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

Name _____

Address _____

Tel (plus area code if not 510):
(D) _____

(E) _____

Email: _____

Enclosed are my dues for:

- _____ \$30 (Reg).
- _____ \$10 (Low Income)
- _____ \$50 (Sustaining)

Please make checks payable to John George Democratic Club and mail to P.O. Box 18802 Oakland, 94619

For Information call 436-7682.

Join us on the steering

committee—annual elections for steering committee were held on March 3, but we have room for more members. Let us know if you want to be on the steering committee—we welcome your participation! (call 436-7682 or email jgdc@igc.org.)

JGDC STEERING COMMITTEE OFFICERS
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Walter Riley

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