TOWER TALK

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Happy Fathers Day to All Fathers at the San Francisco Towers

As sons and daughters, we are grateful for all you did and still do for us

Review & Preview

This issue marks *Tower Talk's* 2019 publishing midpoint. Past issues in this volume have dealt with the three verities: (1) the specter of death haunting senior centers more than other venues, (2) taxes for which we pay a higher premium than most others to live in California, and (3) comparisons of San Francisco to upstate New York having but two calendar seasons, winter and road repair. This issue exhibits a change in tone and contains articles ranging widely from politics, to public transit, to the price of men's fashion. Austin and Van Ness are not bickering publicly this month. They are on another luxury cruise striving to stabilize their fractious personal relationship.

Finally, whereas this issue will not dwell upon it, it would seem remiss not to mention SFT's Executive Director's May 16 public letter admonishing residents to be sweet. Who can disagree? This has been Sugar's mantra from day one, but what triggered her letter?

Politics: President Trump and the 2020 Election

James W. Guthrie

While there are many Democratic contenders, there will likely be but one Republican Presidential candidate of consequence. Our 45th President, Donald J Trump, assuredly will run for re-election in 2020, only a year and a half from now. He established a re-election campaign committee shortly after taking office in January of 2017. Ever since, he has been holding rallies, raising millions in campaign funds, and making campaign forays into politically strategic U.S. cities. Will Trump win again: possibly, but not assuredly.

On the negative side, polling reveals he is vulnerable and currently could be defeated by one, and possibly two, Democratic Party candidates, Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders. Each of these likely nominees runs 5 to 8 percentage points ahead of Trump when survey respondents are queried about favorableness and voting predisposition.

Current polling results do not now reveal that any one of the other 20 announced Democratic candidates has an election chance against Trump. These polls do not take into account the possibility of an independent candidate, e.g., Starbucks' founder, Howard Schultz. A popular third-party nominee would likely hurt any of the Democratic candidates much more than Trump.

There is an additional negative side for Trump. The current bull market in stocks and stunning economic statistics may not automatically translate into a reinforced Trump voter base. Literally millions of jobs have been created since the 2016 elections. However, they are not in occupational sectors and geographic venues that proved to be unusually important in the 2016 Presidential election. The current economy, what with its seldom seen favorable employment figures, high and persistent consumer confidence, and soaring GDP, is indeed stunning; but it does not include a booming manufacturing sector and, thus, may not be translating into electoral college popularity in places Trump won previously. Moreover, there are vexing trade and tariff issues that could damage the Midwest manufacturing and agricultural economy.

Trump captured crucial Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin Electoral College votes by a total margin over Clinton, across all three states, of 70,000 popular votes. Trump did not so much win in these states as Hillary lost. To emerge victorious in 2020, Trump needs to retain this "Rust Belt" base.

On a positive note, Trump's job approval figures in the highly reliable Gallup surveys now hover at a high of 46%. The less reliable Rasmussen poll, undertaken daily, rates him at 50% voter favorableness. These are not terrific figures for a President seeking re-election. However, they are higher than former President Obama's job approval rating at this point in his first term as President, and he handily won re-election in 2012.

William Clinton's 1992 campaign advisor, James Carville, gained 15 minutes or more of personal fame by proclaiming elections always: "are about the economy, stupid." If this is true, and over the next 18 months economic reports continue their positive trajectory or even if they only maintain present levels, Trump will likely win. However, he will need the "Rust Belt" to succeed.

Trump may have an inexplicable and somewhat eerie force behind him. An asynchronous move to the right appears to be swelling across Western nations. Austria, Poland, Italy, Germany, and other European nations have witnessed the resurgence of right-leaning political parties.

If there is any reader who does not think elections matter, consider the fact that Trump has already made two U.S. Supreme Court appointments and a second term might facilitate another two or even three, thereby setting the nation's highest court on a conservative path for decades to come. (It should be noted, however, that Trump's two Court appointees have already begun to take unpredicted positions in opposition to each other.)

What's with All the Democrats?

James W. Guthrie

Democrats today are where Republicans were four years ago; in a word, leaderless. When an opposing President is at least slightly vulnerable, why are Democrats in such seeming disarray? Joe Biden's recent emergence as a strong front-runner might change the situation. His long political experience, strong polling figures (especially with Trump's political base), and fundraising capacity may scare off many current competitors and give Democrats greater organizational stability. If Obama, and perhaps House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, would openly endorse him, Biden could quickly become the Democratic leader. However, they are unlikely to take such a bold step so early in the race. If Pelosi, Obama, or Hillary miscalculates, and Biden loses, each will have forfeited a great deal of political capital. Pelosi has the most at stake.

As of this writing, however, there are 22 individuals formally registered as Democratic candidates for the presidency. In addition, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, is said to be considering entering. These 22 or more are governors, U.S. Senators, members of Congress, local mayors, and business executives stemming geographically from Washington and Montana in the West and stretching through the upper Midwest to the Atlantic coast where there are Democratic presidential hopefuls in New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Massachusetts. These are men, women, African-Americans, Asian, gays, Hispanics, and more. It is a wider than ever

spectrum of individuals. (An interesting absence is a southern Democrat. Fifty years ago, the South was the party's base. It is now, generally, Republican.)

Not until recently have we seen so many primary candidates. When Donald Trump announced his candidacy in 2016, he faced 16 primary opponents. Are such large numbers to be the wave of the future? What is taking place?

In the past, the Republican and Democratic National Committees and prominent party figures, including past Presidents, have been in control. However, in 2016, there was no leading Republican. Romney and McCain had each lost to Obama and had forfeited much of their political gravitas. There was no heir apparent on the Republican side. Hence, a large number of individuals thought they could succeed in an open field. The most unlikely of all, Trump, ultimately prevailed.

Today, there is no prominent leading Democrat. Both Clintons, but particularly Hillary, have exhausted their political shelf life and lost much of their fundraising capacity. Obama increasingly appears to be an historic anomaly on the political radar screen with little remaining national or global presence and his influence restricted to African-Americans and a few others.

House Speaker, Nancy Pelosi, understands that her party must remain centrist to win, but it is now yet clear that she can be a king maker in the currently crowded candidate cadre. It is all about raising funds for campaigning. If Pelosi can do that, and she has been good at it to date, she may emerge as the strong leader the Democratic Party needs. If she endorses Biden, Democrats may begin to speak with one voice. Otherwise, current campaign chaos dominated by a boisterous left wing of the Party will imperil their challenge to Trump. Moreover, to this point the Democratic House cannot claim any legislative victories as a record upon which to campaign.

However, there is another factor at work. It is the proliferation of social media. With vastly reduced costs, a current candidate can seek visibility through Facebook, tweeting, Snapchat, Instagram, etc., all relatively free to anyone desiring to broadcast his or her views. Registering as a candidate is inexpensive. Publicizing one's self is less expensive than ever. Hence, it is no surprise that the number

of candidates has proliferated. Why not run? Winning could be huge, and the financial and personal costs are low. What's to lose? Maybe one will get lucky. Look at Trump. Why not me?

Trump is no doubt enjoying the chaos. He sits on a huge campaign war chest. Grass roots Democrats are committed to change and will make dollar donations. (Democrats typically substantially outspend Republicans.) However, if potential donations must be spread over dozens of Democratic contenders, it is greatly to Trump's advantage. Stayed tuned.

Bay Area Public Transport: Plentiful Pluses and Many Minuses

James W. Guthrie

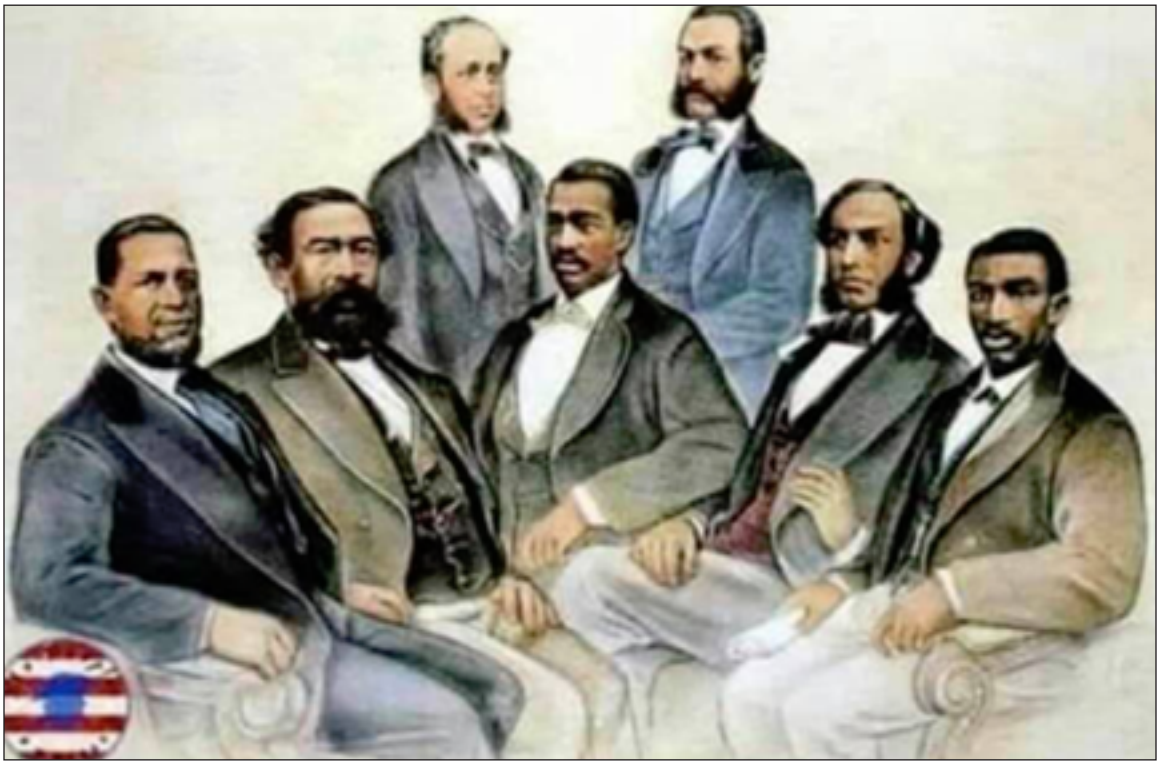
Recently, my wife and I made several round trips on Caltrain* between San Francisco and Palo Alto. For the first trip, I did my Online research; I knew train schedules, cost and ticketing with a Clipper Pass,† getting to the station using Uber or, if time permitted, via the 47 Muni bus, and where to get on and off. Nevertheless, it was all-new, and I did not want something to go wrong.

My anxiety was misplaced. It was a marvelous travel experience. The number 47 bus on Van Ness is quick and boards in front of Infinity one block from San Francisco Towers, and the route takes one directly to the Fourth and Townsend Street train depot. Once there, the appropriate departure track is easily identified.

To my surprise, even though we did not need much help, friendly Caltrain officials were readily available to provide information. The triple level modern train cars were easy to board, and seats were remarkably comfortable. The train departed absolutely on time, down to the second, and arrived punctually at each stop en route. The ride was smooth; almost no noise, no bounces. and few worries about panhandling, bullying, or personal safety. There were plentiful conductors patrolling the cars.

* Not to be confused with the state transportation agency "Caltrans."

† Per person round-trip fare to Palo Alto with Clipper Pass senior discount is $7.40.



Little known fact: First 23 African-American Congressmen were Republicans.
(As was Abraham Lincoln.)

We arrived in Palo Alto on time and a grandson picked us up at the station. It was an enjoyable trip, and far less nerve-racking than driving south on 101 had been previously.

The Caltrain trip stands out not only because it was easy and pleasant, but because it was such a stark contrast to BART.

On a recent BART ride to the East Bay, I sat uncomfortably in a broken seat, strove to see through a barely opaque impenetrable layer of dirt and graffiti on my train window, and was subjected to overly loud rap music issuing from a huge boom box brought onto the train by youths who performed acrobatically in the aisle and sought donations from passengers between station stops.

BART has always had problems. In an effort to build public support for the multi-county election needed to authorize BART, its initial publicist and principal protagonist, Billy Stokes, made huge promises.*

Originally, BART trains were to ride on rubber wheels and be almost silent. The first BART cars were not equipped with hanging straps to enable those standing to hold on safely. Stokes proclaimed such to be unnecessary because trains would be scheduled with such frequency that everyone would have a seat and no one would ever have to ride standing up. Then, when this turned out to be utterly false, the cars had to be refitted structurally so car roofs would be able to withstand the added weight of strap hangers. Today's new BART cars contain a forest of straps for standing commuters.

But, BART difficulties did not stop there. Stokes wanted trains to look sleek, like jet fighter planes. Consequently, lead and end cars were sloped as though they were going to fly them. However good looking these cars, made in France by the way, stylishly sloped front cars always had to be in the front or last car position. A great deal of time and labor was lost in marshaling yards when assembling trains because of these specialized shapes. Later purchased cars are less stylish and doubled-ended for flexibility

Stokes promised that BART would travel at 120 or more miles per hour. Indeed, the electric propulsion system is capable of just that. In the early days, I watched an operator take a BART train through the trans bay tunnel at speeds up to 140 mph. (One can see train speed on a digital readout visible through the glass door in the operator's compartment.) However, such high speeds were never to become commonplace. The electronic train tracking, control, and communication system, designed by an engineering consortium, Parker, Brinkerhoff, Tudor & Bechtel, simply did not and still does not permit such high speeds. Another dream made and quickly dashed.

BART early on suffered because San Mateo County voters turned thumbs down on the idea of joining the multi-county system. Without San Mateo as an integral part, it was impossible to loop the Bay. Another dream doused.

But BART's problems are not restricted to the operation and maintenance of equipment. In recent years, as BART crime has escalated, the elected Board of Directors, and possibly management, have colluded to suppress crime reporting on grounds that it hurts ridership. This is a terrible mistake. Riders have a right to know if something is unsafe, be it the equipment or the station environment.

The dramatic differences between BART's unpoliced, dirty, and late running cars and Caltrain's, safe, punctual, tidy and reasonably comfortable conveyances set me to thinking. Why is one system so comforting and comfortable, and why is the other so dirty, crowded, and unpleasant.

BART's problems are as much political as they are technical. The nine directly elected BART board members, often dominated by individuals with career political ambitions, frequently grandstand, intrude too often in the operation of the system, and take too little responsibility for its drawbacks.

Caltrain is governed differently. It is a consortia governed by the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (PCJPB) consisting of appointed representatives of agencies from the three

* SFT resident, Helen O'Hanlon, was a high placed BART administrator working for Billy Stokes. Bart's limitations are not her doing. Oh yes. The BART Board announced in late May they are considering a fare increase.

Comparative Overall Rating		
Conveyance	**BART**	**Caltrain**
Passenger Safety	Feels Unsafe. Station surveillance and episodic station and train policing are insufficient	Feels safe. Constant station and train surveillance and policing are reassuring
Car Cleanliness	Pigsty	Spotless
Station Cleanliness	Spotty	Good
Fare per passenger mile	High and increasing	Low (particularly for seniors)
Equipment	Wearing out	Modern
Schedule frequency	Adequate	Adequate
Governance	Dysfunctional	Responsible

counties served by Caltrain. I am not sure what it would take to transform BART, but I would appreciate someone thinking about the issue.

Speaking of trains, I am reminded of Paul Sedway's *Tower Talk* article on the high-speed rail line being constructed down the Central Valley. He labeled it a "Train to SOMEWHERE."* Paul could not be more right. The entire high-speed railway is turning out to be a mistake, a hugely expensive mistake. There are roughly $10 billion federal dollars committed, not to mention open ended state financial obligations.

It is increasingly clear that this train should not be built. The federal funds particularly, and state funds also, could be used to the benefit of everyone by building more reservoirs so as to protect precious Sierra snow melt. California has not constructed a major reservoir since 1960. In the almost six decades, between then and now, the state population has doubled, and water supplies remain stable. The solution is to transfer federal funds from transport to water. We would all be the better as a consequence.

Bottom line: Caltrain is good, BART is not. BART is overseen by an overly politicized directly elected nine-member governing board. Caltrain is a service-oriented consortium with an appointed governing board representing related Bay Area agencies.

* Vol. III, No. 17. Mid-August, 2017, page 1

Beau Brummell: 19th Century Dandy

James W. Guthrie

What you wear signals who and what you are. Now is a good time for a man who wants to dress stylishly and project an image of being competent and composed. Not since the British fashionista Beau Brummell pranced down the Mell in 19th Century London, and began to set style standards, have there been so many alternative sources for men's dress. Moreover, even though there is a wide range of prices, there now is no need to spend at the upper end of expense in order to look good.

Of course, one can always jet across the pond and go to a fancy tailor on Bond Street or Saville Row, or even travel to Paris. There one will pay $7,000 to $10,000 for a bespoke suit. The principal benefit of such high-end purveyors is the range of fabrics from which one can choose. (The best fabrics come from Italy.) Otherwise, one is paying far too much for clothes one can obtain domestically with comparable style and quality.

Tom James is a high-end clothier with offices and show rooms in America's major cities. The actual manufacture of their men's clothes is in Minnesota. Their San Francisco address is in the financial district at 351 California Street. They have lovely fabrics for shirts, suits, and sport coats. A fitting agent takes 19 different measures for a shirt and another 20 measures for suit coats and slacks. Then, in approximately six weeks and $500 poorer, you will receive a shirt made for you.

(Twice a year they have a sale and you can get the same shirt for $300.) If you want more than a shirt, a suit will cost you $3,000, to $6,000 and you can pay up to $5,000 for a blazer alone. The styling is classic. The material is virtually unmatched, and the quality of manufacturing high. However, as with the high-end London and Paris tailors, and even though the shirts or suits will last you forever, you are paying too much. Nordstrom men's clothing will provide comparable quality at a similar price but will be slightly less personally tailored.

San Francisco has its own high-end tailor who provides a far better bargain. His name is Andy Gorges. His shop is on the fourth floor at 500 Sutter St. He can offer a range of fabrics and fine tailoring that will give you a lifetime suit for $2,000. (Some fabrics might take the price up a bit higher.) If this is what you choose, have some fun, and select an absolutely wild suit coat lining. There are several far less expensive alternatives that can offer both good value and good looks.

Beau Brummell, by name of George Bryan Brummell, (born June 7, 1778, was an Englishman deemed the leader of fashion at the start of the 19th century.)

Jos. A. Banks, located at the intersection of Post and Stockton, on the first floor of the Stockton Street garage, offers a wide range of shirts, both dress and casual, slacks, sports coats, suits, ties, and men's accessories. If you buy two suits, you can usually get them for $500 each. Sometimes on sale, they are $300. Jos. A. Banks does not offer a wide range of fabrics. However, if you can live with a blue, brown, gray or muted pinstripe or plaid you can have a stylish wardrobe for a reasonable price. The clothes are made from good wool and tailored in Mexico. The closer you are to a standard size, 40, 42, 44 regular or long, the better fit you will get, the less tailoring you will need, and the better you will look. If you are extremely tall or sadly out of shape, these ready-made clothes are not as good as if you are a "regular" guy.

What is said above for Jos. A. Banks can be said for the Men's Wearhouse. In fact, they are owned by the same company and rely upon the same manufacturing. Their prices are the same. It is just another marketing avenue.

If you were willing to risk a catalog purveyor, then Paul Frederick's may be for you. Either go on line or use their catalog to find items and styles you want, provide your measurements, and then they will make for you what you want. The styles are modern, the fabric is good, and if you do not like it, you can return it and get your money back.

If you can tolerate a less formal more casual style, Orvis is a good outlet. This is like Paul Frederick's, an online or mail order operation. You send them your measurements and they will make you something pictured in their catalog. The best thing about Orvis is the material is absolutely first rate, the tailoring is done nicely, shirts, jackets, and other gear will last forever. The price is comparable to Paul Fredericks and Jos. A. Banks.

If none of the above appeals to you, you can shop at Costco and wear jeans and a T-shirt like the 20 and 30-year-old billionaire techies all around us on the San Francisco streets.

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