

In many ways, Obama's inauguration will be this generation's March on Washington. Experiencing it in person will far surpass any learning that would take place in the classroom.



PATRICK TEHAN — MERCURY NEWS

San Jose State students, from left, Nick Dovedot, Carlos Moreno, Derek Sijder and Justin Perry wash cars to help raise funds for the trip.

TRIP | Students raising funds to witness history

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against the clock to raise about \$25,000 to cover the cost of plane tickets, a rental van, and inexpensive hotel rooms. The students and the two professors hope to fly to Memphis for the start of the road trip on Jan. 10.

"The morning after the election, I saw how energized and moved the students were by the historic night," Cheers said. "By midday, the idea of the trip just came to me."

Cheers' grandfather was denied admission to the University of Mississippi 30 years before James Meredith integrated "Ole Miss" in 1962. As a teacher in Mississippi before coming to San Jose State, Cheers has been to several of the civil rights landmarks numerous times.

He planned the trip to begin in Memphis, Tenn., at the Lorraine Motel, the site of King's assassination in 1968 and part of today's National Civil Rights Museum. Because King was killed 44 years ago, the slogan of the road trip is "44 Years to the 44th President: Connecting Our Civil Rights Past with America's Historic Future."

From Memphis, in one large van, the group will drive through the Mississippi Delta and stop at the Tallahatchie River, where 14-year-old Emmett Till was murdered in

1955 for allegedly flirting with a white woman. Photographs of his mutilated body, first published in Jet magazine, haunted and inspired an entire generation of civil rights activists.

Other stops on the road trip will include a walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala., where armed officers attacked peaceful civil rights demonstrators in 1965. The group will also visit Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church, the Martin Luther King Center in Atlanta, and the original Woolworth's whites-only lunch counter in Greensboro, N.C., where college students launched the first sit-ins.

After 10 days on the road, hours in a cramped van and more than 1,200 miles, the group will arrive in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 19. They will earn three academic credits for the trip, which will count as an independent study program. They plan to fly back to San Jose on Jan. 21.

"I'm most interested in meeting people in the South and getting their take on the past, the present and the future," said Derek Sijder, 25, a photojournalism major from Los Angeles who has never been to the South. His only time in D.C. was on an eighth-grade field trip. This time, he says, it will be a more

HOW YOU CAN HELP

The group needs financial donations, but will also accept frequent flier miles, equipment and vouchers for hotels. Contact Amy Freitag at San Jose State's School of Journalism, (408) 924-3241.

profound experience.

"I didn't vote in the last election, but I voted this time," Sijder said. "I heard there are going to be about 3 million people there. It was a watershed event when Obama was elected in November. But to be there when it's made official — it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Throughout his nearly two-year campaign toward that presidency, Obama always made it clear that his improbable political career — as the son of a white woman from Kansas and a black man from Kenya — was only possible in America. And he regularly thanked the men and women of the civil rights movement, whose willingness to march, protest, withstand beatings and even die made his success possible. "I'm here because you all sacrificed for me," he said in 2007. "I stand on the shoulders of giants."

A journey through civil rights history that is topped off with the historical inauguration will be special in so many ways.

"I have never been to the South in my entire life, I've never been to an inauguration, and this election was the first one I could even vote in," said Nick Dovedot, 21. "I was trying to figure out a way to get to D.C. on my own, but this is the best idea by far. It's going to be magnificent. I may not experience this type of exhilaration again in my lifetime."

Time is short: The students and professors have less than six weeks to raise money, and are holding car washes and bake sales to generate desperately needed funds and attention.

"There's not a lot of money flowing around this place," said Bill Briggs, director of San Jose State's journalism school. "When an opportunity like this comes along we'd love to be able to say, 'Do it, and we can foot the bill.' But we can't."

Briggs supports the trip because he has strong memories of attending the March on Washington in 1963 as a high school student. The Mall was so crowded that he couldn't see or hear King's "I Have a Dream" speech, and he ended up sleeping in a church basement with doz-

ens of other teenagers.

"I had never seen so many black people in my life," said Briggs, who grew up in San Mateo. "I had never felt that kind of energy. Everything about it was overwhelming. It made an indelible impression on me for the rest of my life."

In many ways, Obama's inauguration will be this generation's March on Washington. Experiencing the day in person will far surpass any learning that would take place in the classroom. At the same time, the pioneers of the civil rights movement are aging and dying — and this might be the last chance for San Jose State students to talk to those who began blazing the trail for Obama in the 1950s and '60s. Obama's inauguration is historic by any nature; arriving in Washington via the Deep South will make it all hit home.

"In 2012 or 2016 we might elect more black people to high public office, but this is the first time," said Briggs of the presidency. "I want our students to be able to participate in this piece of history. It ain't gonna come around again. We have to seize the moment."

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WEATHER | Snow, rain on the way

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get this weekend when we look up at the snow-capped peak is a face full of wet.

The forecast is for a 30 to 40 percent chance of showers Saturday and Sunday, but it may all add up to only a quarter-inch of precipitation. That's literally a drop in the bucket. San Jose's rainfall total for the year is 1.52 inches, just 44 percent of what used to be considered "normal." Last year at this time, the city was at just 59 percent of normal, so parched seems to be the new normal.

"At this point, we need above-average rainfall just to get us to average water supply," explained Susan Siravo, spokeswoman for the Santa Clara Valley Water District.

In other words, we should be at 3.44 inches of rainfall by now, with creeks and streams burbling happily, and aquifers filling like bowls full of jelly. This year? Not so much.

Even if you're one of those people who tend to see the glass as half full, fuhged-aboutit. It's actually half empty. And likely to stay that way.

"We're not in an El Niño or La Niña year," Walbrun said. "We're just stuck in neutral. Obviously, we need the rain. But if we can get these short bursts of light-to-moderate precipitation, that might actually be more beneficial to avoid flooding in places like where the Summit fire burned in May."

The coming storms will bring much bigger snow dumps to the Sierra Nevada and Lake Tahoe, where Walbrun says "it looks like they'll start to get some of the first significant snow of the winter." There could be several feet of new powder on the slopes by early next week.

"That would get them going right before their Christmas holiday starts," Walbrun said. "If it all pans out, the real winners will be the ski industry."

The losers, unfortunately, could be the rest of us.

The water district has been drawing on its reserves over the past year, dipping into the groundwater basin without replenishing it. According to Siravo, that has left the valley's reservoirs at 45 percent of capacity. "We need storms that are powerful enough to produce runoff," she said. "When we get light rain like this, it's certainly good, but it doesn't really do much for us."

If the situation doesn't improve, drastically, over the next several months, the water district could be forced to recommend rationing for the first time since 1991. "At that point, there were people who were letting their lawns die because they didn't want to use water," Siravo recalled. "It's our job to meet the demand. If it involves bringing water in from outside the county, that's what we're going to do."

Even if it means bringing it all the way from Sarah Palin's porch.

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Some female dolphins use tools; males lounge

SPONGES ACT AS NOSE PROTECTORS

By Thomas H. Maugh II
Los Angeles Times

When it comes to using tools, some dolphins are like dysfunctional human families — the females work hard all day finding food while the males hang out with their buddies.

Female bottlenose dolphins living in 30- to 50-foot-deep channels off Australia's western coast bury their noses in sponges and use them as a tool to root through the sandy ocean floor for bottom-dwelling prey. It is the only known instance of dolphins or whales using tools.

In the first in-depth analysis of this curious behavior, marine biologist Janet Mann

of Georgetown University and colleagues reported Tuesday in the online journal PLoS One that the sponges protect the dolphins' noses from abrasion. "They can also cover more area than they can with their beak, which is pretty narrow," she said.

About 11 percent of female dolphins in Western Australia's Shark Bay area use the technique, passing it down to their daughters, the scientists said.

Only a small proportion of their male offspring learn the technique, however. Once they are weaned, they tend to go off and socialize with other males, searching for schools of fish in packs. It is not known if the males' failure to use the technique means they get less food, Mann said.

DEBT | Finding safety, but no return

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bonds, that could choke off funds that businesses need for day-to-day operations.

Investors accepted the zero percent rate in the government's auction Tuesday of \$30 billion worth of short-term securities that mature in four weeks. Demand was so great even for no return that the government could have sold four times as much. In addition, investors who held another ultra-safe security, the already-issued three-month Treasury bill, for a brief but extraordinary moment traded at a negative rate of 0.01.

In these times, it seems, the abnormal has now become acceptable. As America's debt and deficit spiral from a parade of billion-dollar bailouts and stimulus packages, fund managers, foreign

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governments and big retail investors reckon they will get more peace of mind by stashing their cash, rather than putting it toward any of the higher-yielding risk that is entailed in stocks, corporate bonds and consumer debt.

The rapid decline in Treasury yields — which have headed toward lows not seen since the end of World War II — also renders the Federal Reserve less effective, as investors and banks stuff the money that the Central Bank is pumping into the financial system into Treasuries, rather than fanning it out across the broader economy.

"The last time this happened was the Great Depres-

sion, when people are willing to accept no return on their money, or possibly even a negative return," said Edward Yardeni, an independent analyst. "If people are so busy during the day just protecting the cash they have, it's not a good sign."

Stocks fell sharply as investors digested the implications. The Dow Jones industrial average fell 242.85 points, or 2.7 percent, to 8,691.33, and the broader Standard & Poor's 500-stock index closed down 2.3 percent, to 888.67. The Nasdaq composite fell 1.6 percent.

If there is a silver lining to the Treasury market's gyrations, it is that the United

States can borrow money more cheaply from investors, whether they be the governments of China or Japan, or big fund managers. That could help Washington fund various programs designed to revive the ailing economy. Borrowing by the Treasury has already ballooned since Congress approved the \$700 billion financial rescue plan, and policymakers expect the federal budget deficit to swell further next year as the Big Three automakers and other industries look for support.

"That sucking sound is all the world's capital going into the U.S. Treasury market," Yardeni said, "which means the Treasury and the Fed can tap into that liquidity pool to finance TARP (the Troubled Assets Relief Program, or bailout) and offer mortgages at 4.5 percent."