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### Publication Date

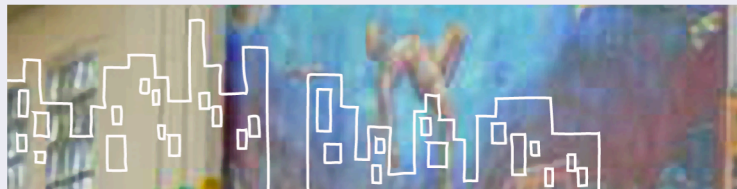
2007-05-11

ISSC WORKING PAPER SERIES 2005-2006.21

**Violent Design: People's Park, Architectural Modernism  
and Urban Renewal**

**by Peter Allen**

**Architecture Department  
University of California, Berkeley  
May 11, 2007**



**INSTITUTE FOR  
THE STUDY OF  
SOCIAL CHANGE**

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The events surrounding the 1969 struggle over People's Park in Berkeley, California were among the most violent confrontations of the 1960s era. Typically, these events are seen as an episode of increased student radicalism and the anti-Vietnam war movement. Instead, this paper argues that conflict over competing visions of urban space was at the center of the People's Park violence. The park movement was a reaction to the University's plan to raze existing older housing in order to expand the campus, build modernist high-rise residential towers, and pursue a joint urban renewal program with the city. Park supporters, which included many design professors and students, drew on emergent new paradigms in planning and architecture. The park became an inspirational test case for theories of community-based development in architecture and planning, exposing the profound divisions in the design professions that characterized this time.

“We shall build our new culture  
on the vacant lots of the old.”

Anonymous, Berkeley, May 1969.

### **Prologue: May 15, 1969**

*May 15, 1969 was one of the most violent days of confrontation between American police and students of its era. It began at 4:30 a.m. when Berkeley police officers, acting under the orders of the Regents of the University of California, closed down the recently founded People's Park, evicting its few volunteer guardians. The park was founded a month earlier by a loose, diverse coalition of young residents (radicals, hippies, and mainstream residents) and Berkeley students (largely from the law and architectural design schools) who took over an abandoned plot of land the University had purchased, cleared, and left sitting vacant for over a year. For just over a month, the park had existed as a self-created, organized, and managed exercise in community planning.*

*By 6 a.m., the crew of San Jose Steel Company had arrived to build the “fastest fence in the west,” around the park. They were protected by 250 California Highway Patrol officers who, dressed in riot gear, equipped with rifles, and wearing bulletproof flak jackets, were ready for combat. At 10 a.m., architecture and urban planning professors of the California School of Environmental Design (CED) made another in their series of proposals to Berkeley's Chancellor Roger Heyns to have the park remain open as a planning and landscape design “experimental field station.” But the Chancellor had already left for a meeting in Washington, D.C., leaving no one responsible for the spiraling events at the park.*

*At noon, a planned rally on Middle East issues quickly changed into a rally for the park. Law student and park supporter Dan Siegel was only one in a list of speakers, but just when he shouted, "Let's all go down to the park," the electric amplifiers went out. While it is unclear whether Siegel intended to lead the crowd of some 3,000 to 6,000 protestors on a march to the park, the crowd went off with chants of "take the park, take the park!" Partway down Telegraph Avenue, the group ran into a wall of police including 250 California Highway Patrol officers, Berkeley police, and Alameda County Sheriff's Department officers. The Alameda County officers, known locally for their light blue riot coveralls and hatred of Berkeley radicals, were often called "Blue Meanies" in reference to the Beatle's song "Yellow Submarine."*

*As the rally spiraled out of control, the Alameda Officers loaded their shotguns with birdshot and buckshot and began firing into the crowd. It is still debated whether this decision was authorized by a field officer, Alameda County Sheriff Madigan, or Edwin Meese III, Governor Ronald Reagan's Executive Assistant who attended police strategy meetings and was an ardent anti-radical.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, for the first time ever in U.S. university environs, police officers fired 00 buckshot capable of killing a running deer into a crowd of students and local residents. Police later defended their actions by claiming self-defense in the face of a violent mob. However, eventual court testimony, filings with the ACLU, and oral histories of individuals present that day all described police officers under little apparent threat firing directly into the crowd and bands of marauding officers firing at will at innocent passers-by. San Francisco Chronicle photographs showing officers firing into the backs of running protestors from over 30 feet away were reproduced across the nation. Police, many of whom were conservatives from the suburbs and under the direction of a Sheriff and Governor's assistant who despised*

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Steven Roberts, "The War between Reagan and Berkeley," *New York Times*, May 25, 1969.

*Berkeley's radical left, turned on protestors with a ferocity that shocked Bay Area residents and Berkeley faculty and students.*

*The shotgun blasts seriously injured over one hundred people including innocent bystanders and several journalists. At the end of the conflict, two individuals suffered punctured lungs, five were permanently disfigured with bird shot wounds to the face, one ended up with 125 birdshot pellets in one leg, and one was permanently blinded. Worst of all, the buckshot blast of Alameda County Deputy Sheriff Louis Santucci killed James Rector while he was standing on the roof of a building overlooking Telegraph Avenue. According to many, Rector was an innocent bystander watching events. The official report to Governor Reagan, however, failed to address how or why Rector died, and instead stressed Rector's several arrests for drug possession.*

*Governor Reagan, who ran on a campaign promise to "clean up that mess in Berkeley," had already declared a State of Emergency for Berkeley in 1968. He now ordered in National Guard troops and placed Berkeley under a "state of siege." The State of Emergency banned all forms of demonstrations, meetings, and speeches and imposed a 10 p.m. curfew. For over the next three weeks, as negotiations over the park's future between the university and park supporters continued, numerous episodes of violence, rallies, and marches punctuated the state of siege. For the first time in U.S. history, government helicopters sprayed tear gas on American citizens. As helicopters dumped tear gas on Sproul Plaza, the gas spread into classrooms and nurseries, where it affected professors, students, staff and small children. In another incident, Alameda County officers rounded up thousands of students and residents and brought them to Santa Rita prison where they subjected them to beatings and numerous other cruel punishments for over 24 hours. Berkeley, as a University and a town, was virtually shut down.*

*During the May 15th violence, an announcer from local radio station KPFA reached John Lennon, who was in the middle of his “bed-in” protest against the Vietnam War with Yoko Ono. Presumably from bed, Lennon expressed his support for the People’s Park effort and said, “the monster doesn’t care, the Blue Meanie is insane. We really care about life.” However, Lennon ultimately concluded: “I don’t believe there is any park worth getting shot for.”<sup>2</sup>*

## **Introduction**

The slim, blue campus planning publications of the Educational Foundation Laboratories (EFL), buried deep in the library stacks, seem far away from the violence of People’s Park and the death of James Rector. This paper argues, simply, that they are not. The Ford Foundation founded EFL in the late 1950s to advocate for modern architecture and planning on American universities, and in critical countries such as Germany. U.C. Berkeley campus planning, like that at many large universities, developed relationships with EFL, particularly in residential hall design, as part of its larger adoption of modernist approaches to campus architecture and planning. Supported in part by EFL, U.C. Berkeley embarked on a project to build high-rise dorms, surrounded by open lots, for up to 9,000 students.<sup>3</sup> These projects were the culmination of a decade-old program of planning by the University that utilized modernist architecture and planning methods. They were also the culmination of a long process of University expansion into the largely residential neighborhood just south of campus that included the plot of land that became People’s Park.

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<sup>2</sup> W.J. Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War, the 1960s* (1989), p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> *Building System Feasibility Study for University of California Student Housing* (October 4, 1965), p. 9.

While People's Park has received almost no historical treatment, the few treatments that do exist situate it in the context of student radicalism, the anti-Vietnam war movement, or as an anarchic spin-off of the more accepted 1964 Berkeley Free Speech Movement. Simultaneously, most histories of campus planning and architecture ignore the link between the rapid physical expansion of the postwar university and student unrest.<sup>4</sup> I argue, however, that the violent events surrounding People's Park were an outgrowth of modern planning and design developments that accompanied the dramatic growth of post-war research universities like Berkeley. The events in Berkeley paralleled the San Francisco's so-called Freeway Revolts in which citizens protested and defeated urban renewal and urban freeway schemes, and the 1968 upheaval at Columbia University where students rebelled against the University's expansion into Morningside Heights Park.

At its heart then Peoples Park was a piece of urban space presented with two conflicting paradigms of design and governance. Those in power saw social disintegration in events like those at Berkeley, while those at the bottom saw the rebirth of a new kind of community power to protest the unjust imposition of an urban order. In this sense, the battle over urban space at People's Park resembles the distinction between dominated and appropriated spaces that Margaret Kohn describes in her book *Radical Spaces*, based on Henri Lefebvre.<sup>5</sup> Dominated spaces are produced through *expert knowledge* for standardized citizens by the state in its quest for what James Scott describes as a domain of legibility, in which space is emptied out and remade in legible ways. Appropriated spaces, however, subvert the logic inherent in Scott's

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<sup>4</sup> In his history of the post-war university planning, for instance, Stefan Muthesius writes that, "the student movement is of less relevance here . . . because less of a link was constructed between the unrest and the nature of the campus plan or architecture." Muthesius continues, "the unrest in the USA was essentially more concerned with matters external to the university." Stefan Muthesius, *The Post War University: Utopianist Campus And College* (Yale U. Press 2000), p. 201.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Kohn, *Radical Space: Building the House of the People* (2003).



*Seeing like a State*. They are spaces *produced* by ordinary people, based on their own *situated knowledge* and experiences.

Events like People's Park have been recoded as a purely black/white contest between leftist radicals and Reaganite conservatives. However, as historian Kristin Ross wrote regarding the 1968 Paris riots, the recoding of these events as a "failure" because radicals failed to seize centralized power diminishes the very definition of "political." Instead, "political" expanded to include experiments with new forms of local, collective self-organization to govern everyday life. While conservatives such as Governor Ronald Reagan painted People's Park as the attempted seizure of political power by radical elements, that history ignored it as an example of the power of community spaces to provide a forum for mainstream political organization at the local level.

Moreover, I argue that it was through spatial contestation at places like Berkeley and a similar event in Columbia in 1968 that a new generation of designers and planners developed an appreciation for both community planning and the historical and regional aspects of architecture. Architectural history has reduced the profound changes that occurred in the profession during the 1960s to a handful of books—Robert Venturi, Steven Izenour, and Denise Scott Brown's *Leaving Las Vegas* (1972) and Jane Jacob's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), foremost among them. While these books were significant, cultural events and the active participation of urban and design professionals in those events played an equally important role in overthrowing modernist paradigms. Furthermore, while many commentators increasingly deemed the modernist experiment in making social change a failure, this did not mean that architecture was no longer a vehicle for social change. Rather, through innovation, experiment, and engagement with communities at the local level, architects and designers sought new ways

of making positive social change. It was not until postmodern architecture returned architecture to a purely formal and artistic approach at the end of the 1970s, that the social engagement of the modern movement was fully rejected.

The growth of the institutional “multiversity,” the University’s physical expansion, and the dramatic population changes to the south Berkeley campus neighborhood all influenced student protest movements. “Architecture, housing and city planning,” the noted housing reformer and professor of urban planning Catherine Bauer wrote in anticipation of World War II’s end, “are pre-eminently arts of peace.”<sup>6</sup> By the 1960s, however, the disjoint between modernism’s rhetoric and its impact in the campus environment put the professions at the center of a civic battlefield.

In this paper, I will first step back before the events of May 1969 to describe the “top-down” vision on planning for the south campus area. Secondly, I will return to May 1969, and the creation of People’s Park and its vision of “bottom’s up” planning. Thirdly, I will explore the role of professional architects, professors, and students during the three-week period of violence and negotiation over the park’s future.

## **Modernism, The University and Urban Renewal**

“Although knowledge has no visible bulk, it requires space as surely as students do.” – Clark Kerr<sup>7</sup>

Histories of modern architecture in the academic environment have typically focused on a few unique examples where modernism was successful during the 1950s and 1960s, such as Yale University where works by Eero Saarinen, Gordon Bundshaft, and Paul Rudolf proved

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<sup>6</sup> Catherine Bauer, *TASK* (1944).

<sup>7</sup> Muthesius, p. 10.

influential. Largely ignored, however, are the more general examples of institutional modernism in campus architecture that most of America's rapidly expanding universities adopted during the same period. Yet, arguably, the poor results of modernist design on the majority of campuses did as much as any failed public housing project could have done to spark disillusionment with modernism among architectural students and other campus youth.

As one historian of university planning, Paul Turner, stated, American university architecture is “shaped by the desire to create an ideal community and has often been a vehicle for expressing the utopian social visions of the American imagination.”<sup>8</sup> By the late 1950s, the utopian vision included a vision of a new kind of educational institution—the “multiversity.” The University of California system was the premier multiversity, defined by Clark Kerr, its President, as having multiple campuses, thousands of students, and hundreds of scientific research programs. This new educational utopia evolved, in part, out of the immense population growth to universities brought on by the post-War G.I. bill and the explosion of government spending on scientific research that resulted from the 1957 “Sputnik shock.”

Modernist design and planning became the primary tools used by those seeking to enact this new utopia.<sup>9</sup> In the environment of the multiversity, university campus planning became a highly bureaucratic process. Professional bodies and research groups such as the EFL and the Society for College and University Planning were founded and dedicated to campus planning. Simultaneously, Richard Dober laid down his vision of the new science in his 1963 book *Campus Planning*. Under the EFL and Dober approaches, “utmost rationality” pervaded all considerations. Planning required an analysis of need, the translation of that need into space requirements, and the creation of “planning modules” – distinct buildings for each distinct

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<sup>8</sup> Muthesius, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Rorabaugh, p. 6.

teaching or administrative unit. These texts especially espoused the “tower in the park” model, and were replete with images of modernist academic towers.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, modernist advocates of campus planning, exemplified by a 1949 Joseph Hudnut article in *Architectural Forum*, rejected the Beaux Arts ideal of a unified and grand composition for campuses. Thus, modernism helped universities transcend classical principals of visual unity and composition and to erect new buildings wherever they could.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, as advocates of modernist campus planning abandoned Beaux-Arts requirements of visual order and composition, they also abandoned the notion that building programs should be limited to the campus. Nationwide, university campus plans pushed the university outward into the surrounding urban fabrics.

As anyone who has struggled to identify Berkeley’s original Beaux-Arts plan beneath the ad-hoc sprouting of mediocre modernist towers knows all too well, U.C. Berkeley embarked on a massive program of modernist expansion. Before the war, Berkeley campus planning had been the job of a single architect from the Architecture Department. In 1949, however, the University created the Office of Architects and Engineers, which relied upon outside planning professionals and institutions. Berkeley’s 1951 planning report, “Planning the Physical Development of the Berkeley Campus,” jettisoned Beaux-Arts concepts of monumentality in site design that would “straight-jacket” the University, and pronounced that “long ago all resemblance to the vision of 1897 ceased to be.”<sup>12</sup> The University plans continued with development supported by funds from the EFL. One of the primary projects was a university residential building system (URBS),

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<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Harold Riker, *College Students Live Here: A Report from Educational Facilities Laboratories* (1961).

<sup>11</sup> Paul Venable Turner, *Campus: An American Planning Tradition* (1984), p. 260.

<sup>12</sup> The Office of Architects and Engineers, University of California, “Planning the Physical Development of the Berkeley Campus,” (December 1951), p. 3-4.

which would use a “systems approach” to student housing and would improve “function performance at lower cost.”<sup>13</sup>

William Wurster, who returned from MIT in 1950 to become Dean of the Architecture School, joined with Clark Kerr to lead campus planning throughout the 1950s. Today, Wurster remains an emblem of Bay Area “regional modernism,” the form in which architectural modernism reached the Bay Area in the 1930s. As an alternative to the international modernism that was prevalent in the U.S. in the 1930s and 1940s, regional modernism balanced abstract international modernism with a sensitivity toward local materials and site. By the end of the 1950s, however, regional modernism was on the decline, and the myopic focus of architectural historians on Wurster’s early domestic work ignores his large body of later commercial and institutional work that reflected the principles of international modernism he acquired at Harvard and MIT. By the time he took responsibility for U.C. Berkeley’s 1955 Long Range Development Plan, the redwood-cloaked modernism of his early domestic work was long gone. Wurster’s plan called for buildings pulled together in “tight groups, reflecting functional relationships,” and the *Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne* inspired requirement that buildings cover only twenty-five percent of a plot.<sup>14</sup> More importantly, Wurster’s 1955 plan relied on a plan of dramatic campus expansion into the neighboring city, particularly into the residential area south of the campus.

The 1951 and 1955 campus plans committed U.C. Berkeley to purchasing large lots of land outside the campus and to develop high-rise, modernist residential halls, administrative buildings, and specialized sports fields. The plans placed buildings in a densely inhabited,

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<sup>13</sup> Building Systems Development, Inc., *Building System Feasibility Study for University of California Student Housing* (October 4, 1965), p. 1; University Residential Building System, *A Project of the University of California, “Phase III Report*, (February 1970), p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Muthesius, at 47.

largely residential neighborhood area just south of campus, bisected by the commercial strip of Telegraph Avenue. Older housing stock, mostly shingled housing dominated the south campus area. A 1961 survey, for instance, showed that fifty-one percent of the buildings were built before 1910, sixty-six percent were built before 1920, and less than seven percent were built after 1940.<sup>15</sup>

The plans advocated the systematic land acquisition of forty to fifty acres for the continual development of the campus. Most of this space was dedicated to residential halls that would “be built to the maximum height permissible” to conserve land.<sup>16</sup> In 1952, the Board of Regents estimated that 25,000 additional students would be attending U.C. Berkeley and twenty-five percent of them would need university housing. The Regents proposed acquiring forty-four additional acres of land to accommodate this influx of students. Thirty-three of the proposed acres were located in the south campus area and one of them included the plot that would become People’s Park.<sup>17</sup>

Given the anticipated influx of students, the 1956 Master Plan developed by Wurster, the Regents, and the “Committee on Campus Development,” centered around using the newly acquired land to construct modernist towers that could be used as residential dorms, exemplified by the residential towers designed and built by Warnecke and Warnecke. The Master Plan committed the U.C. to a plan of expansion based on the destruction of privately owned housing. The plan alerted homeowners that their land would soon be subject to the University’s power of

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<sup>15</sup> William B. Nixon, Urban Renewal Coordinator, City of Berkeley, “Berkeley’s Opportunity for Urban Renewal,” A talk before the Sather Gate merchants’ Association, (January 10, 1961), p.5. In urban renewal folder, box 4, CU-14.2, Bancroft Library Archives.

<sup>16</sup> “Planning the Physical Development of the Berkeley Campus,” (December 1951), p. V-2.

<sup>17</sup> See generally, Stanley Irwin Glick, “The People’s Park,” Ph.D. Dissertation, history, (SUNY Stony Brook 1984), p. 27-28.

eminent domain.<sup>18</sup> At the time, the University did not foresee that its plan for expansion would run into an emergent student population that rejected high-rise dorms for more flexible living arrangements and an assurgent youth population that viewed modernist architecture as symbolic of institutional top-down power responsible for the deterioration of the historical and social fabric of neighborhoods.

More importantly, by the mid 1960s, demand for residential dorms had evaporated. The great post-war building boom was at an end. Why then did the University go ahead with its plans to purchase large tracts of land in the south campus area, such as the People's Park site, and then raze existing properties? The answer can be found in a failed plan for Urban Renewal by the City of Berkeley.

### **Urban Renewal and the South Campus**

In the mid-1960s, the University and the City of Berkeley undertook a campaign to designate the south campus as an urban renewal district. Berkeley's urban renewal program had begun work as early as 1957. Just as the University was plotting its expansion into the south campus area, the program released the results of a study titled "Urban Renewal in Berkeley." The report authorized the appointment of an urban renewal staff committee and began the complicated process of following the steps outlined under federal law, which required cities intent on a renewal program to make a finding that the renewal zone was "blighted," though it gave virtually no direction on standards to make that determination. The Berkeley Planning Department therefore shortly issued another report titled, "The Problem of Blight in Berkeley" January 15, 1958. The report borrowed "The Oakland Census Tract Approach" from the

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<sup>18</sup> Claudia Baker, et al., "A Case Study of Urban Ecology and Open Space: People's Park," p. 1. Available in Bancroft University Archives.

Oakland City Planning Department's method. This approach analyzed each census tract by census data and applied penalty scores for various factors such as the percentage of dwellings older than 1920 and the average lot size. A "Block by Block" approach followed the Census Tract Approach. This approach employed a visual evaluation by planning officials that applied penalty points for various criteria such as the state of repair, the condition of plantings, commercial and industrial uses present, amount of auto traffic, state of repair or pavement, and other health and safety hazards including rubbish or litter.<sup>19</sup> Thus, based on visual evidence of deterioration and census data showing that a large percentage of buildings were older than 1920, the Berkeley Urban Renewal Agency could designate an area as "blighted, deteriorated and deteriorating."<sup>20</sup>

At first, the Urban Renewal scheme focused on the more heavily blighted areas in the western Berkeley flatlands – a stretch of land that when connected to west Oakland, formed the heart of the East Bay "ghetto" and the birthplace of radical Black Power movement. It was not until 1959 federal legislation made important amendments that Berkeley seriously developed a renewal scheme for the south campus area.

"Our Twentieth Century Bonanza," declared south campus urban renewal supporters such as William B. Nixon, the Urban Renewal Coordinator for the City of Berkeley.<sup>21</sup> Under the typical urban renewal scheme, the federal government paid for two-thirds the cost and the local city renewal agency covered the other third. A provision in the 1959 amendments to the National Housing Act, however, enabled the city to take credit for the University's previous \$3.5 million spent on land. Supporters of the urban renewal plan touted the financial benefits. Pro-

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<sup>19</sup> Urban Renewal Staff Committee, Berkeley Planning Department, "The Problem of Blight in Berkeley" January 15, 1958.

<sup>20</sup> *The Daily Californian*, March 9, 1966.

<sup>21</sup> Nixon, "Berkeley's Opportunity for Urban Renewal."



renewal papers such as the *Berkeley Daily Gazette* billed the plan as “An \$11 Million Plan That Would Cost ‘Nothing.’”<sup>22</sup> As Nixon exclaimed, the urban renewal plan would give Berkeley “\$8 million in federal renewal grants without spending a single cent of local tax money!”<sup>23</sup>

The plan, first expressed in 1962 as a preliminary urban renewal scheme within the general master plan, and finally adopted in 1965 as the Urban Renewal Plan for the South Campus Project, was unique among U.S. urban renewal schemes. Within the general goal of eliminating blight, the plan emphasized that there was “considerable latitude for creative planning.” Instead of wholesale demolition, the plan called for the rehabilitation of historic structures wherever possible and encouraged a high degree of owner participation. The plan also sought to minimize the disruption, displacement, and relocation of renewal, while maintaining the current range of housing types and rents. The 1965 plan also proposed that Telegraph Avenue become a pedestrian mall. The plan noted that this would “enhance the prosperity of the Sather Gate shopping district,” while preserving the “feel” of the district.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the plan sought renewal while preserving the historic residential feel of the district. In truth, it sought a return to the earlier quiet residences of mature owners—not the bohemia of students and youth the neighborhood had become.

### **The Changing South Campus Population**

Indeed, the south campus area had gone through profound demographic changes in a short time. Looking back on Telegraph Avenue’s rising Bohemia, Fred Cody, the owner of a

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<sup>22</sup> *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, March 11, 1966.

<sup>23</sup> Nixon, “Berkeley’s Opportunity for Urban Renewal.”

<sup>24</sup> Urban Renewal Agency of the City of Berkeley, “Urban Renewal Plan for the South Campus Project,” December 1965.

landmark local bookstore, wrote that the “South Campus began more and more, as the University claimed private housing for its expansion, to exult in a life style that set it apart from most other parts of the city.”<sup>25</sup> Several population shifts were at work during this time. The first shift happened in the 1950’s when a growing numbers of students began to move off-campus for their residential choices. The number of students applying to live in Berkeley residence halls dropped from a 1964 high of 5,064 to 2,898 by 1970, and a U.C. Report showed that the trend towards “apartment living” increased dramatically after 1963.<sup>26</sup> By the late 1960s, resident halls were “facing an ever increasing vacancy rate.” Applications were so low in 1970 that the University began to close some resident towers, and the University became concerned about the necessity of safeguarding its “investment in these halls.”<sup>27</sup> At the same time, there was a marked decrease in enthusiasm for Greek life and fraternity living. Student’s rejection of these housing options was in part due to cultural changes including a rise in sexual freedom and activity that necessitated more private, flexible, and individual living arrangements. As a result, students and youth poured into the older single-family homes in the south campus area, transforming them into apartments and flexible living spaces.

The second population shift occurred during the 1964 free speech movement, which saw an influx of non-Berkeley students to the area. Youth from all over the country, attracted by the atmosphere of political dissent in a still conservative national atmosphere and the growing bohemia of Telegraph Avenue, poured into the area.<sup>28</sup> The increase in population placed

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<sup>25</sup> Pat and Fred Cody, “A View from the Avenue,” in Harriet Nathan & Stanley Scott, eds., *Experiment and Change in Berkeley, Essay on City Politics, 1950-1975* (1978), p. 141.

<sup>26</sup> Robert F. Kerley, Vice-Chancellor, Administration, Report to Vice-President Robert L. Johnson, “Proposal for Residence Halls Renovation” (June 2, 1971), p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> The bohemia on Telegraph Avenue actually got its start from the University policy banning political activity within the Sather gate and on campus. Thus, political activists (beginning, notably, with the Adlai Stevenson presidential campaign, anti-McCarthyism, and the civil rights movement) gathered on Telegraph before approaching the Sather gate.

tremendous pressure on the housing stock of the south campus area. As the Real Estate Research Corporation reported: “[P]ast demolition and apartment replacement rates at these campuses would be sufficient were it not for the fact that a growing number of non-student renters will be competing for apartments.”<sup>29</sup> By 1970, the 20,000 white, twenty-something, *non-students* living in south Berkeley had become the majority of residents.<sup>30</sup> Fred Cody later described the influx as a second gold rush.<sup>31</sup>

The third population shift was a result of the 1951 and 1956 University Master Plans. The two plans alerted most property owners in the south campus area that the University would ultimately purchase their land and demolish the structures. The news created a disincentive for proper maintenance and, by 1969, many long-term, stable residents had vacated the area. Many former residents blamed the demographic shift and deterioration of the neighborhood on the University. They argued that no hippies had lived on the block until the University announced the plan to tear down existing houses.<sup>32</sup> As residents left, many empty houses were left empty and in disrepair. Local activists such as Rowena Jackson criticized the University’s neglect: “They made the mistake of not tearing them down immediately, and then they were squatters who lived in there. It just got to be really bad.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Real Estate Research Corporation, *Future Off-Campus Housing Supplies, University of California Problems and Prospects* (July 1969).

<sup>30</sup> Rorabaugh, at 145.

<sup>31</sup> Pat and Fred Cody, “A View from the Avenue,” p. 141-142.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, “Controversy over Park Began in ’56,” *The Daily Californian*, May 20, 1969.

<sup>33</sup> Rowena Jackson, “Preservation of civil liberties in Berkeley, 1968-1972, notably public schools and people’s park,” p. 41. Available in Oral history project, Bancroft Library Archives. Jackson was a political activist and school teacher, and served on Berkeley’s public safety committee.

## The Blight of Bohemia

Like urban renewal's more general relationship to racial politics, the Berkeley plan was related not just to blight as an architectural phenomenon, but to the south campus's population shifts. The goal of the plan was to develop the area for the University in order to stem the "seedy," rising bohemia of Telegraph Avenue. Urban renewal became a tool that pro-renewal citizens could use to control Berkeley's non-student youth populations. The City Renewal Agency had conditioned its designation of blight on the "'sociology' of the place, which had changed from single family to multiple occupants, without the necessary 'physical' change."<sup>34</sup> Pro-renewal citizens sought development of the area in part, because they were aghast at the "intrusion of the nationwide Beatnik element in their part of town and the image of Telegraph Avenue as 'America's Left Bank.'"<sup>35</sup>

Berkeley sociology professor John Leggett recognized this early on, when he stated, "I wouldn't be too surprised if the political elites tried to eliminate non-students by using urban renewal strategy and taking over the area." Many renewal supporters asserted that the neighborhood should be razed because it harbored a concentration of hippies, radicals, rising crime, and a drug culture.<sup>36</sup> Conservative Berkeley City Council member Don Mulford argued that the University should proceed with demolition to eliminate a "human cesspool." Mulford even advocated building parking lots instead of the current housing, solely in order to "get rid of the rat's nest that is acting as a magnet for the hippie set and the criminal element." Even after the urban renewal plan was eventually defeated, the Berkeley city community remained

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<sup>34</sup> *Daily Californian*, March 9, 1966.

<sup>35</sup> *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, March 10, 1966.

<sup>36</sup> Baker, et al., p. 2, quoting *The Daily Californian*, February 15, 1968.

committed to “clean[ing] up the South Campus area and to run out the beatniks, hippies, and other undesirables.”<sup>37</sup>

Renewal supporters primarily complained that students and youth were changing the use of neighborhood homes by converting single-family homes into apartments and rooming houses. Thomas Cook, the city’s Urban Renewal Coordinator in 1966 lamented at the renewal agency hearings, that the “South campus area has . . . evolved from an area of fine single family homes to an area which consists largely of apartments and rooming houses.”<sup>38</sup> Another renewal report argued that original single-family homes now converted into apartments and rooming houses had “problems of adequacy of light, ventilation, sanitation, interior room arrangements and obsolescence.”<sup>39</sup>

A Police Department presentation and report given to the Urban Renewal committee offered further evidence that bohemian blight underlay the renewal effort. The Police Department argued that narcotics crime had become so serious in the area that “the neighborhood must be completely renewed if it is ever to become a crime free area in which Berkeley can again take real pride.”<sup>40</sup>

## **The Defeat of Urban Renewal**

Despite the promise of free federal funding, many residents were skeptical of the need for urban renewal on the basis that the neighborhood suffered from blight.<sup>41</sup> A strong opposition to renewal emerged, as residents resented the planning process and disliked dictation from an

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<sup>37</sup> Rorabaugh, at 150.

<sup>38</sup> “South Campus Urban Renewal Project, Description of Physical Characteristics,” Statement of Thomas Cook, prepared for the March 14, 1966 Urban Renewal Agency Hearings.

<sup>39</sup> Report given by Robert Amber, prepared for the March 14, 1966 Urban Renewal Agency Hearings.

<sup>40</sup> Berkeley Police Department, “Staff Presentations at hearing Regarding South Campus Renewal” (March 14, 1966).

<sup>41</sup> Wallace Johnson, “Berkeley: Twelve Years as the Nation in Microcosm, 1962-1974,” in Nathan & Scott, *Experiment and Change in Berkeley, Essay on City Politics, 1950-1975*, p. 205.

outside agency.<sup>42</sup> In the spring of 1966, opposition to the urban renewal project, led by the Sather Gate Merchants Association (a group of local merchants and landlords), was so strong and widespread that the Berkeley City Council reluctantly rejected the scheme. Much of the opposition to the renewal effort centered on the planned destruction of some Telegraph Avenue businesses (particularly coffee houses) for a new service alley. The middle-class business community's rejection of the renewal scheme and free federal money was unprecedented and reflected just how much residents had come to oppose renewal's top-down planning.

Without the support of the city, the University was left to implement the urban renewal plan on its own. In doing so, it asserted its responsibility to correct the urban bohemia it was partially responsible for creating. When then Chancellor Roger Heyns presented a resolution in 1967 to the U.C. Regents to purchase the site, he conceded the "University's partial responsibility for the deterioration of housing, the high crime rate in the area, and the rise in the area of 'hippie concentration' and rising crime."<sup>43</sup> He also admitted that "many residents held the University responsible for the deterioration of housing and other property in the south campus area," and that the University shared "some of the responsibility" for the area's deterioration.<sup>44</sup> Believing that the University was responsible for the social deterioration of the south campus area, Heyns pushed for purchasing the remainder of allocated property in the Master Plan. Specifically, he pushed to purchase the block 1875-2, the People's Park site, which at 2.8 acres was the largest unpurchased lot.

During the 1960s, the University used its power of eminent domain to purchase over forty-five additional acres and destroy older buildings in order to make way for new dormitories and parking lots. Homeowners were unhappy because the University offered only fifty to

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<sup>42</sup> *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, March 10, 1966.

<sup>43</sup> Glick at 32-33.

<sup>44</sup> Glick, at 32.

seventy-five percent of the market value of the property.<sup>45</sup> In the end, the University destroyed hundreds of existing low cost-cost housing units that students increasingly preferred in order to build dormitories that many students would shun.<sup>46</sup> In 1967, the University finally purchased the plot of land destined to be People's Park and sent out eviction notices to the residents of the four-block parcel with little advance notice.<sup>47</sup> As one student would later report:

I lived on the future site of People's Park from September to December 1967. My rent was only \$48 per month but the living conditions were very satisfactory. The housing in the area was generally very nice, old brown shingle houses, both single family and student housing. I didn't even know that the University had any interest in the land when I received a three day eviction notice from the University during Fall quarter exams. . . . [my] house on Dwight Way stood vacant until the middle of 1968.<sup>48</sup>

The student was not alone. Several reports indicated that the University unsympathetically evicted many students in the weeks before their final exams.

The 1967 purchase brought the total number of acres acquired by the University up to 45, 41 of which had been residential plots.<sup>49</sup> Demolition started in November 1967 and lasted until December 1968.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, after demolishing the homes, the University left the People's Park site vacant. Building stalled because the need for new dorms had vanished when students rejected campus housing and University funding was drying-up under the new conservative governorship of Reagan. The great era of university expansion and building was at an end. The question remained: what to do with the site?

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<sup>45</sup> Nixon, "Berkeley's Opportunity for Urban Renewal."

<sup>46</sup> Joe Rubenzahl, "Berkeley Politics, 1968-74: A Left Perspective," in Nathan & Scott, eds., *Experiment and Change in Berkeley, Essay on City Politics, 1950-1975*, p. 323.

<sup>47</sup> Claudia Baker, et al., "A Case Study of Urban Ecology and Open Space: People's Park," p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Jim Chanin, Chairman, Berkeley Police Review Commission, April 1974, in Rubenzahl, p. 323.

<sup>49</sup> Glick, "The People's Park," p. 29

<sup>50</sup> Baker, et al., p. 3.

## Building the Park

By April of 1969, the site of People's Park had been vacant for almost a year. It had become a mud-soaked vacant block that served as an impromptu parking lot. Ruts, garbage, weeds, old foundations, rotting automobiles, and the randomly parked cars of numerous students filled the site. Mike Delacour, a law student, decided that the site would make a good place for outdoor rock concerts. He gathered other locals, including Wendy Schlessinger, Stew Albert, members of the Berkeley Yippies, such as Art Goldberg, and the local landscape architect Jon Read to discuss creating a park at the site and hosting regular rock concerts and other events.

The group bought an ad in the local left-wing newspaper *The Berkeley Bard* announcing that there would be a gathering on Sunday, April 20<sup>th</sup> to create a park. Delacour and the others were somewhat surprised when several hundred residents including families, professors, students, residents, and most surprisingly, hippies (who Delacour and the others had always considered too lazy for such work) showed up carrying shovels and ready to dig. Someone brought a tractor to excavate the foundations of old housing the University had demolished. Over the next three and a half weeks, the project ballooned, drawing in thousands of local residents, students, and professors. Estimates suggested that as many as a thousand people a day were working or using the park during the week and as many as 4,500 people were using the space on the weekends. The park eventually expanded to fill the entire block. The community added various elements including a "people's garden," a child's play area (especially popular with neighborhood parents as no other parks existed in the area) and other play structures. Even Black Panther co-founder Bobby Seale showed up to visit the park and was clearly impressed. He asked the organizers: "You mean you just took the land without asking anyone?"



## The Park as a Critique of Rationalist Modern Planning

The movement to create the People's Park took place against a background of rising community rebellions against federal urban renewal programs. The movement began in the Bay Area as early as 1955, when the so-called "Freeway Revolt" halted the construction of a major urban freeway through Golden Gate park, and San Francisco became the first major city to halt the urban freeway building mania. Residents of the Western Addition, San Francisco's primary renewal district, organized and fought against urban renewal and for replacement housing, winning the first court injunction in the country against an urban renewal project in 1968.<sup>51</sup>

The creation of People's Park also took place against the backdrop of the emergence of the Black Panther Party in nearby Oakland. Black Panther members were frequently on Telegraph Avenue and the group presented a radical attack on post-war liberalism's urban development schemes. After decades subject to white liberal urban planning, the Black Panther Party presented a "Declaration of Independence" from the urban plantation.<sup>52</sup> Just as early student radicals in the free speech movement were inspired by their volunteer efforts in Southern civil rights campaigns, student radicals of the late 1960s borrowed freely from radical black power movements in a struggle against the business and political elite. Rather than attempt to negotiate through complicated University power structures that they no longer believed in, the young residents simply took direct action and transformed the vacant lot.

For its creators and supporters, the park presented a challenge to modernist tower block architecture, to the lack of community involvement in modernist planning, and to the University's unwanted expansion beyond campus borders. Young residents frequently expressed their challenge in the ephemeral handouts, self-published newsheets, and wall postings that

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<sup>51</sup> Richard Walker, "An Appetite for the City," in Brook, Carlsson and Peters, ed., *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture* (1998).

<sup>52</sup> See, Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (2003).

constituted the primary medium through which park supporters communicated. One handout asserted: “We understand the calculated attempt by the authorities to clean up the south campus area to be an attempt to oppress and destroy that part of the community which puts the challenge to their arbitrary, irresponsible use of power . . . The question again is control. We believe that the people in the community should control their resources . . . it was our adherence to these principles of community control and community participation that led us to the belief, on which we acted, that the unused lot should be made productive as a park.”<sup>53</sup>

Another publication rallied: “A new Berkeley is being planted in People’s Park. Creating the park has been the most spontaneous and positive event in the emerging showdown between the industrialist-University machine and our revolutionary culture. We have struggled for rights, for space, and now we struggle for land. We need the park to live and grow.”<sup>54</sup> A third handout titled “Outcry from Occupied Berkeley,” stated that “people came to the park not to force a confrontation with the university but because for the first time they had a place they felt was their own—a place where they could do real labor and have real community.”<sup>55</sup>

The language used by People’s Park supporters and creators suggests they were expressing an anti-rational modernist approach to planning and design. *Liberation Magazine*, for instance, wrote that the basic principles of the park were “community, spontaneity, and opening of time, space and life in relation to the environment.”<sup>56</sup> To many residents, the park represented a victory over the University’s expanding modernism. To be able to stroll in the Park was to be

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<sup>53</sup> Leaflet by unnamed authors. Available at Bancroft University Archives, # CU-14.2, in folder, People’s Park-Berkeley-1969, Dissident material, general.

<sup>54</sup> “A Proclamation by Madmen,” leaflet by unnamed authors. Available at Bancroft University Archives, # CU-14.2, in folder, People’s Park-Berkeley-1969, Dissident material, general.

<sup>55</sup> “Outcry from Occupied Berkeley,” leaflet by unnamed authors. Available at Bancroft University Archives, # CU-14.2, in folder, People’s Park-Berkeley-1969, Dissident material, general.

<sup>56</sup> *Liberation Magazine*, July, 1969.

able to remind yourself that sometimes, echoing Mario Salvo, “you *can* win against the machine.”

Park advocates saw the project as an attack on the seemingly unstoppable urban growth in the Bay Area region, and the lack of open space in the densest urban areas. For these residents, Salvo’s machine was also the unimpeded metropolitan growth caused by the post war boom in the Bay Area (particularly in the East Bay). For example, one advocate wrote that: “In the Bay Area Alone 21 square miles of open space is devoured by asphalt and development every six months. Half the size of the city and county of San Francisco. More industry, more high-rise buildings, more bay fill, more urban renewal, more repression, more pollution. Less space for people. Less space for places like the People’s Park.”<sup>57</sup> The same sentiment appeared in one of the Berkeley Planning Department’s own reports. The 1969 report noted that Berkeley had an exceedingly scarce supply of parkland, two acres for every 1,000 people, much less than the region as a whole.<sup>58</sup> For its supporters, the park was an “affirmation of the human needs for quiet, open space, recreation and self definition.”<sup>59</sup> As the *California Monthly* concluded, the “surprising support that the park issue engendered among many people in the community may have been due to a growing sense of alienation from, and lack of control over, the physical form the city was taking.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Bay Area Institute, ECO ECHO #1, in Oscar Burdick Collection, BANC MSS 99/196, Box 1:14, People’s Park Clippings.

<sup>58</sup> Berkeley Planning Department, “Open Spaces: The Choices Before California” (1968).

<sup>59</sup> Bay Area Institute, ECO ECHO #1, in Oscar Burdick Collection, BANC MSS 99/196, Box 1:14, People’s Park Clippings.

<sup>60</sup> *California Monthly* “Goodwill, Learning and the Rule of Reason have Become Battle Casualties: Perspectives on People’s Park Crisis” p. 10 (October 1969).

## **Architecture and Planning Professional Support for People's Park**

The People's Park events, like the events in Columbia in 1968, drew widespread support for architecture students and faculty. In the section below, I discuss the support offered by the architecture and planning communities during the roughly three weeks in May 1969 when the University and park supporters negotiated the future of People's Park. This support, I argue reflected emergent fault lines within the profession over the ability of modernism to bring about positive social change.

## **Changing Architectural and Planning Paradigms, Urban Parks, and Experiments in Community Planning**

By the late 1960s, academic architecture and planning departments were deeply divided internally over the modernist project, and indeed, whether architecture and urban planning should have any social mission at all. Less than a generation after becoming the dominant paradigm on campuses, modernism was under attack from within the profession. Significant critiques of renewal and rational planning proved influential in planning circles by individuals including Jane Jacobs (1961), Martin Anderson (1964), and Herbert Gans (1962). In architectural schools, meanwhile, renewed appreciation of historical and regional styles of building was being taught through the works of Vincent Scully's (*The Shingle Style*, 1955) and Charles Moore. Critiques of the profession were particularly visible in Berkeley, where the work of Moore, Donald Lyndon, Joseph Esherick and others in the landscape architecture departments reemphasized history, local materials, and the human scale.

Frequently overlooked in architectural history are the multiple experiments by the generation after modernism that continued architecture's mandate for social change through

community planning, and in particular, in community parks within inner city neighborhoods as a conduit to solving inner city problems. But as a 1969 report by the Landscape Architecture Department would assert, after ten years of failed sporadic attempts to improve blighted urban areas, the concept of community participation in neighborhood parks was emerging as a new tool for solving inner city problems. Several architectural schools including Columbia, Harvard, the Pratt Institute, and Berkeley worked directly with the community through non-profits such as the Architectural Renewal Committee in Harlem. In addition, so-called “urban field stations” established design-orientated extension programs in inner-city neighborhoods. In each case, the idea was to get designers to participate directly in community service programs and support community-led park developments in inner city neighborhoods.

Similarly, in January of 1969, the architecture department at Berkeley gave its approval for a new course on community design and an option for a community design emphasis in the A.B. program. The new course and emphasis stemmed from the department’s belief in the growing need in inner-city neighborhoods and minority communities for trained architects and designers. As Berkeley professor Claude Stoller wrote in his 1971 Proposal for a U.C. Berkeley urban field station in San Francisco, “We shape our environments and afterwards our environments shape us. This view holds that the capability and opportunity for individuals to participate in reshaping their home and neighborhood environs is a prerequisite to ordered human growth and effective social evolution.”

Much of the new effort focused on empty abandoned lots left behind in inner cities. In the early 1960s concerned professional designers, such as Karl Linn in Philadelphia, began to realize that vacant urban lots presented an opportunity for open space in densely populated urban areas. Linn’s 1961 Mellon Street Park in Philadelphia, built by a neighborhood group and

students, was an experiment that established the interim use of privately owned but undeveloped land for community use. While professional planners, particularly in the Bay Area, had focused on regional parks and greenbelts for middle-class automobile owners, these new designers were realizing the need to bring open space directly into the city – not just as a recreational space, but also as a space for community empowerment.

### **Architecture and Planning Professionals and People's Park**

During the three weeks of conflict over People's Park, a number of architecture and urban planning faculty who saw the possibilities for community participation in design argued for its return as a community-led park. The most frequent critic was Professor Sym Van der Ryn, who went on to become California's State Architect and a leader in the emergence of the sustainable architecture movement. As the new head of the University's Committee on Housing and the Environment, he attacked the obscure internal planning process of the University. In 1969, he issued a report on the events at People's Park. The report argued: "The fact is that at every level our public institutions and local governments are failing to meet fundamental needs and people are trying to do something about it." Throughout these events we have seen "a failure of archaic procedures for making decisions" about land use, a "failure to create procedures for the kind of broad consultation and discussion that is absolutely essential in dealing with the new and different problems that face every large urban university in its relations with its surrounding community." Mostly, Van der Ryn criticized the planning approach of the multiversity: "Our strongest impression of the planning process in the University of California system and at Berkeley is that it is obscure . . . the obscurity of the process breeds suspicion and often anguish over what they have done." Van der Ryn continued, "we expect that a university

(of all places) would consciously seek to plan with the community and not for it . . . it is clear that the present planning methods are simply not good enough” [original emphasis].<sup>61</sup>

In a separate publication, Van der Ryn argued that the park “appeared to satisfy real and pressing human needs. For the first time, hundreds of young people felt the sense of performing meaningful work towards creating a place of their own.”<sup>62</sup> People’s Park was a “constructive and appropriate use” of the site, Van der Ryn argued, and “for the first time, hundreds of young people felt the sense of performing meaningful work towards creating a place of their own.”<sup>63</sup> Van der Ryn concluded, “Our position from the beginning has been that the People’s Park represented an interesting and important phenomenon that called for an equally creative response by the University.”<sup>64</sup>

Other architectural professionals also weighed in on behalf of the park. An all-day “Teach-in to Support People’s Park” brought together Berkeley city planning Professors Donald Appleyard, John Dyckman, and Roger Montgomery, in addition to Van der Ryn and architectural critic Alan Temko. Robert Greenway, the Director of planning at the U.C. Santa Cruz campus, was also present and argued that the park filled a need for a “physical and psychic space and represents a different set of ethics than Reagan-style California.” Perhaps carried away by the excitement, Greenway shouted, “put your bodies on the line . . . tell the national guardsmen to ‘go ahead and shoot’ . . . Your vision should not be one park but thousands of parks.”<sup>65</sup> Thomas Hoving, director of the New York Metropolitan Museum, and former parks chief of New York City also spoke and argued that the park was “getting people to build something beautiful,” and that the “crushing out of People’s Park” was an act of “obscene stupidity by people in high

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<sup>61</sup> Chancellor’s Committee on Housing and the Environment, “1968 Report,” p. 6.

<sup>62</sup> Sym Van der Ryn, “Building a People’s Park,” (July 1969).

<sup>63</sup> “Of Police, Military Lawlessness” *The Berkeley Bee*, May 24, 1969.

<sup>64</sup> Sym Van der Ryn, “Building a People’s Park” (July, 1969).

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Maitland Zane, “Put you Bodies on the Line,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 29, 1969, p. 2.

places.”<sup>66</sup> Temko, then architectural critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and eventual winner of a Pulitzer Prize for his architectural criticism, called the park the “most significant advance in recreational design since the great parks of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>67</sup>

The three departments of Berkeley’s College of Environmental Design (CED) offered significant support for a community maintained park. The Department of Landscape Architecture prepared a 32-page document for the Academic Senate Policy Committee outlining in detail historical precedents for a user-developed park. The report asserted that the “feeling of helplessness” felt by community members was “even more frustrating in situations where the parks and recreation centers which are provided tend simply to reflect general theories of recreation and outdated concepts of design . . . [S]uch rigid and inflexible formulations do not recognize the specific qualities of the communities in which they are situated.” Citing to Thomas Hoving, the report noted, “we have had enough of the swing, slide and sand box stereotype, the black topped, link fenced asphalt prison.”

Numerous CED faculty members, including Spiro Kostof, Roger Montgomery, Corwin Mocine, Richard Meier, and Carl Schorske signed a public letter from Berkeley faculty in May 1969 for publication in the *Los Angeles Times* and other papers. The letter called on Governor Reagan to remove the National Guard from Berkeley and stop the escalation of violence. Moreover, students and faculty of the CED teamed together to develop a survey to support the park and argue against University claims that the park was a public nuisance. Under the direction of professors Roger Montgomery, Donald Appleyard, Lecture Clare Cooper, and others, over seventy students volunteered to conduct an opinion survey in the neighborhood

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<sup>66</sup> Id.

<sup>67</sup> See Frederick Berry, Thomas Brooks, Eugene Commins, “A Report on the People's Park Incident” (1969), p. 5. Temko was also cited in an editorial opposed to People’s Park as saying, “You are starting a new era in democratic city planning and more power to you.” “Views on Violence” *Sun City News* (June 5, 1969).



around the park. While the University based its initial decision to fence off and close the park on an argument that neighbors complained about noise and drug use in the park, the CED survey of 931 households found that 94% did not agree that the park was a nuisance. The survey found that a clear majority favored keeping the community-run park, while only ten percent of respondents were in favor of the University maintaining control over the park for University purposes.<sup>68</sup>

Eventually, in late May 1969, the CED created two proposals to save the park. Both proposals were in response to Chancellor Heyns request to Van der Ryn's Committee on Student Housing and Environment to come up with a constructive solution to the park dilemma. On May 6, Heyns gave the committee three weeks to come up with a park negotiation committee and a plan for the park's continuation. The CED first proposed creating a non-profit organization to run the park on behalf of the local community. Eighty-one percent of local residents in the CED survey supported the idea. William Wheaton, the dean of the CED, and a noted housing and planning expert, assembled a team of lawyers, law students, and CED students to develop a non-profit corporation that could take over operations of the park and provide the University a legal option for relinquishing the park. Wheaton and the team worked all night to file incorporation papers in Sacramento to meet a deadline for presentation to the U.C. Regents. Wheaton also testified before the Berkeley City Council on May 25, 1969 and presented a paper that cited park experiments in Philadelphia, Oakland, and San Francisco as precedents for community developed and managed parks.<sup>69</sup>

The second CED proposal, also presented in late May 1969, was to turn People's Park into an "experimental field station" in community design and planning that would be under the

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<sup>68</sup> CED, "Letter to Chancellor Heyns," May 26, 1969.

<sup>69</sup> "People's Park Not A New Idea," *San Francisco Examiner*, May 26, 1969.

responsibility of the CED. The experimental field station idea would allow the park to survive while providing a means to study ways to involve community action groups in civic planning. Mike Delacour, a principal park founder, supported this idea: “[The] idea [is] that we’d be specimens in some kind of laboratory and they’d all come and observe us.”<sup>70</sup> The CED faculty voted overwhelmingly for a resolution in support of CED sponsorship of the park. The resolution asserted that: “the spontaneous development of a community park offers our faculty and students an opportunity to study an on-going process of participatory design . . . [E]xperts in the field of community planning have long recognized the value of a process in which citizens participate directly in establishing and fulfilling their needs.” Advocates touted the field station model as a way to allow students and faculty to test new concepts in park design and recreational equipment directly with the community.<sup>71</sup>

### **Negotiating the Park**

In response to the CED proposals, and Chancellor Heyns’ May 6 request to negotiate the future of the park, the loose diverse coalition of park leaders assembled a People’s Park Negotiating Committee. On May 21, 1969, the Negotiating Committee offered Chancellor Heyns four different options for the park that would be acceptable to park users. These options included the proposal for an experimental CED field station, the Wheaton proposal for a non-profit to run the park, and a plan to lease the land to the city as a park.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 14, 1969, pp. 1, 7.

<sup>71</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 16, 1969, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> *The Daily Californian*, May 21, 1969. *See also*, Claudia Baker, et al., *A Case Study of Urban Ecology and Open Space: People’s Park*, p. 3.

By this point, the idea of preserving a community maintained park in some form had received widespread support throughout the U.C. system. The heavy-handed and violent tactics of Governor Reagan and the Alameda Sheriffs Department, widely covered in the press, as well as the obvious need for park open space in Berkeley, pushed moderate residents and students to support the park. Numerous votes in late May 1969 demonstrated support for the park. In an ASUC referendum, Berkeley students voted overwhelmingly to support the park's survival and indicated their desire that the park remain managed by the citizens and students of the Berkeley community. The referendum of 14,969 students saw the largest turnout in Berkeley's history, and 85% of the student voters voted for the park. In the Academic Senate, faculty members also supported the park and opposed Governor Reagan's violent tactics. A report for the Academic Senate prepared by Professors Berry, Brooks, and Commins on the People's Park violence asked: "The question, then, is whether the genuine intentions of those actually in control of the park were truly part of 'a deliberate and planned attempt at confrontation,' rather than a larger, mainstream community movement?" The answer, the report declared, was no.<sup>73</sup> The Academic Senate then voted 642 to 95 (87%) for a statement that Reagan should reverse course and remove the National Guard troops. The Berkeley City Council followed with an 8-1 vote requesting Reagan to remove the National Guard and for a solution to keep the park. Moreover, widespread protests occurred throughout the U.C. system in support of the park.

Finally, Chancellor Heyns admitted that the park was a favored option for residents and students and presented a plan on June 20, 1969 to the U.C. Regents that would lease the area to the city for use as a park. During the presentation, U.C. President Charles Hitch stated, "There is

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<sup>73</sup> Berry, Brooks, Commins, pp. 4-5.

no question that a park of this kind is desired by a large majority of Berkeley students . . . and by many sincere and responsible citizens of Berkeley.” Heyns added that while leasing the land to the city to maintain the user-developed park entailed risks, it would “restore a spirit of community to the town and campus.”<sup>74</sup> Nonetheless, despite the lack of funding or need for more dorms, the U.C. Regents voted 16-7 against the park proposal and endorsed building residence halls, or an eventual unneeded soccer field.<sup>75</sup> In rejecting the plans to preserve the park, the Regents were influenced not only by their own politics, but also by the arguments of the rising star in American conservative movement – Governor Ronald Reagan.

Recent evidence has shed light on the FBI’s secret support for Reagan as part of their mutual desire to rid U.C. Berkeley of communists and leftist radicals, and exposed how Reagan exploited both FBI undercover assistance and a prominent anti-Berkeley political stance in his governorship campaign.<sup>76</sup> Reagan and his personal representative in Berkeley, Edwin Meese III, viewed Berkeley as the “devil’s workshop, a focus of corruption and evil to be subdued, if not eradicated.”<sup>77</sup> While the park represented a broad coalition of people with different motivations, Reagan focused only on the extreme radicals as a means of appealing to conservative voters in California and the larger nation. For Reagan, People’s Park provided a chance to live up to his campaign promise to clean up Berkeley. The park, Reagan asserted, was not even a real park for the people, but a place to grow marijuana. Repeatedly in public comments, Reagan would state: “And now it has been learned that part of the lush greenery that was planted to make the lot a so-called sylvan glade turned out to marijuana.”<sup>78</sup> Emblematic of Reagan’s attitude was Don

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<sup>74</sup> “UC Regents Split in discussions on people’s park fate,” *L.A. Times*, June 19, 1969.

<sup>75</sup> *Berkeley Bee*, June 25, 1969.

<sup>76</sup> See, “Reagan, Hoover And The Red Scare: Secret FBI Files Show How The Bureau’s Covert Campaign To Disrupt The Free Speech Movement And Topple UC President Clark Kerr Helped Launch The Political Career Of An Actor Named Ronald Reagan,” *San Francisco Chronicle* June 10, 2002.

<sup>77</sup> Yandell, p. 83.

<sup>78</sup> Address by Ronald Reagan to the Commonwealth Club, San Francisco, CA (June 13, 1969).

Mulford, Reagan's most ardent ally in the Berkeley City Council, who had proposed the death penalty for marijuana dealers in 1960.<sup>79</sup>

In repeated press conferences and speeches in May and June 1969, Reagan rejected any ideas that called for continuing the park. He commented that the Heyns proposal to lease the park to the city would be like paying off a blackmail to radicals.<sup>80</sup> His comments on June 3, 1969 are exemplary: "I am totally, as a Regent and a Governor, opposed to anything that would in any way be a subterfuge to [ . . . ] give to those people any kind of face saver." The Governor's official report on the events, for instance, prepared on July 1, 1969, stressed only the role of well-known radicals in the creation of the park, while describing at length their police records.<sup>81</sup> Reagan highlighted his position on the park in an important speech he gave at the Commonwealth Club on the issue. He opened with a question: "Was the park an issue of legitimate community concern, or was the project of a "separate rebellious minority promoting a real revolutionary cause?"<sup>82</sup> Reagan made clear that the latter was the case. He saw the leaders of the park movement as only the far left radicalists: "Their names are all on the police blotter," Reagan asserted to the Commonwealth Club. For Reagan, the park was a "phony issue . . . seized upon as an excuse for a riot."<sup>83</sup>

Reagan skewed his comments for deliberate political effect. San Francisco columnist Herb Caen once described how after a U.C. Regents meeting, Mrs. Robert Walker, a Berkeley Planning Commission member, walked up to Governor Reagan and said, "Let the blood of the

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<sup>79</sup> Rorabaugh, at 148.

<sup>80</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, June 3, 1969.

<sup>81</sup> Office of the Governor, State of California, "The 'People's Park': A Report on a Confrontation at Berkeley, California" (July 1, 1969), pp. 3-6.

<sup>82</sup> Address by Ronald Reagan to the Commonwealth Club, San Francisco, CA (June 13, 1969).

<sup>83</sup> Address by Ronald Reagan to the Commonwealth Club, San Francisco, CA (June 13, 1969).

people of Berkeley be on your hands.” “Fine,” the governor replied, “I’ll get some Boraxo to wash it off.”<sup>84</sup> During the public debate over People’s Park, the conservative movement was just beginning to evolve into a national movement that sought to limit the liberal welfare state and curb radicalism and political dissent. As one editorialist commented after the People’s Park events, the “last two weeks at Berkeley has given rise to a new term – Reaganism.” Because the majority of U.S. citizens were confused and afraid of the student protests, Reaganism, he warned, had the “potential of national proportions.”<sup>85</sup>

### **Preserving the Park**

The violence of May 1969 only relented when local moderate community leaders took charge of a planned Memorial Day parade and, with the help of peace marshals, parade direction, and thousands of donated flowers, ensured a parade without violence. The march of 30,000 people was so successfully peaceful that it seemed to automatically restore quiet to Berkeley. Reagan, who by this point had been looking for a chance to remove the National Guard in the face of increasing residential, citizen, and academic pressure, found the excuse he needed to pull out the National Guard. A few incidences occurred over the rest of the summer, but for the most part, the People’s Park violence was over. The University remained committed to the idea of building high-rise dorms on the site well into the 1980s, when it finally did reach a compromise to lease the plot to the city for use as a park.

The University continues to trot out various proposals for the site, and is now engaged in multiple disputes with the City of Berkeley over a new program of expansion into the city, as well as litigation with environmental advocates over a building program that will eliminate

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<sup>84</sup> Herb Caen, *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 26, 1969.

<sup>85</sup> Bruce Olson, “Streetcar Visions” *Western Daily*, Seattle, WA, May 29, 1969.

Berkeley's last remaining oak tree grove for a football stadium. Like modernism's return in the form of Neo-modernism, the expansionist university with a large-scale building campaign, backed by private corporate capital, is back.

People's Park is now a city park, but tensions over the political issues have never subsided, which continue to limit its growth and use. Today the park has a fragile, temporary air to it, as if at any moment the University could end its lease and reclaim its property for any of its numerous building projects financed by private donors. Both nationally and locally, it has been forgotten as a historical site of community action – the one thing it did not become is a park that serves the local community of residents or students, who avoid the park completely.

## **Conclusion**

Speaking in February 1969, Sym Van der Ryn proposed a humorous way to use architecture to curb student protest: he proposed that Reagan and his Regents build one of Buckminster Fuller's huge geodesic domes to cover Berkeley and control the climate. Anytime political tensions heated up the campus environment, a blast of arctic air could provide relief. After all, "you would never see large protests in Ann Arbor or Cambridge in January, and it would be a cheaper investment than "maintaining a standing army of police."

Like Van der Ryn's humorous comments, this paper has argued for a link between student protests movements of the 1960s and the modernist paradigms of architecture and planning. It has also argued that architecture students and some faculty became involved in 1960s protest movements as part of a process of inventing new design paradigms. It is my hope that this history will provide a deeper understanding of People's Park that will contribute to current debates on the future of the park and University development.

In addition, I hope that research into experiments in community design and community created public spaces will provide models for our own time. One only needs to turn to the farce of the so-called community forums at the World Trade Center redevelopment projects to see that community participation in design is as weak as ever. As Kristin Ross writes: “It is the role of the democratic theorists/historian to uncover submerged counter histories of democratic practice that can expand our definition of democratic politics.” This is as true in histories of design, architecture and planning as it is in history of politics. We do not have to return to the violence of May 1969, but we should remember that incorporating the community into the creation of public spaces can be a powerful agent of political change.





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