

SAVE PEOPLE'S PARK

A Brief History



This zine was compiled from a Twitter thread by Amanda Hill [@mandapxnda] to spread the word that in 2021, we STILL need to SAVE PEOPLE'S PARK.

I have adapted it from it's original format online. I have also included an excerpt from the Berkeley Free Clinic archives at the end.

"People's Park is under threat. The unelected UC Regents are planning to build 1,000 units of market-rate student housing on the People's Park site. The UC has nine other sites to build on, but they bear an old grudge against the park, and it's looking like they might get their way this time, with the support of progressive Berkeley Mayor Jesse Arreguin." – via savepeoplespark.com

The cover image was taken on January 29th, 2021:

"A large rally, mostly University of California, Berkeley students, and many Berkeley residents, all advocates of People's Park, gathered at the park on Friday afternoon and delivered a set of rousing speeches, eloquent, educational, historical, spanning generations, inspiring in their ideals and vitality." – Greg Jalbert via peoplespark.org.

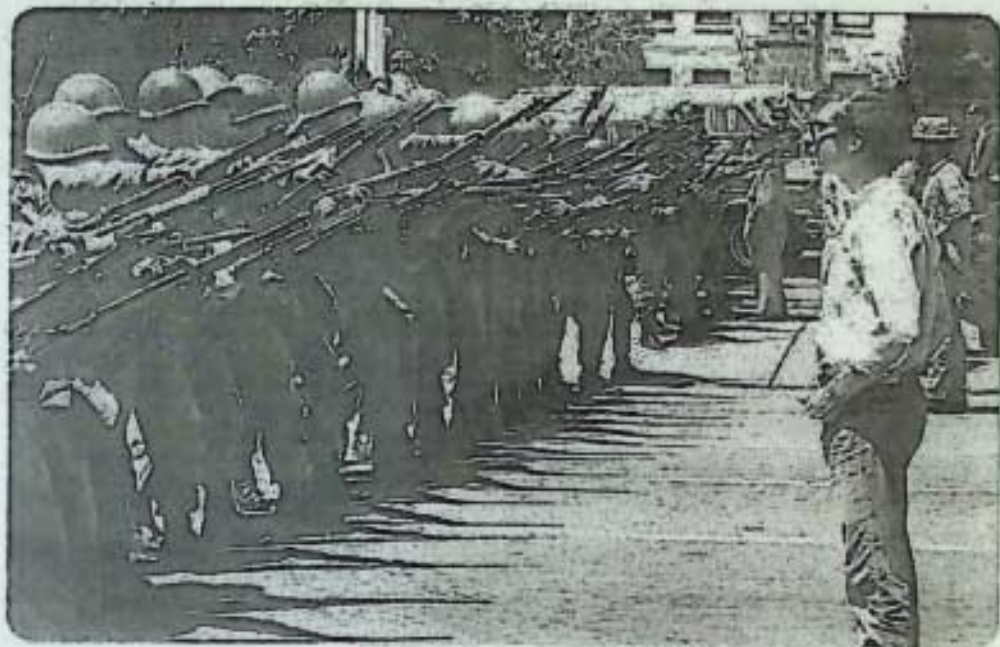


amanda hill

@mandapxnda

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Not many people know the history of People's Park and why it is so important so here is its story:



There are many articles available but most don't go very in-depth about the conflict. Therefore this thread is mostly a summary of this 25 page paper, "PEOPLE'S PARK: BIRTH AND SURVIVAL." California History, vol. 88, no. 1, 2010, pp. 8-55. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25763082.

In 1952, the Regents created a long-range development plan and designated what was then known as Lot 1875-2 for university development.

In 1967, the university finally purchased the property with Chancellor Heyn claiming there was a "desperate need" for a new soccer field in order to justify the transaction.

Obviously, there was no need for a soccer field (in fact the preexisting fields were hardly even utilized), but acquiring and bulldozing People's Park was the solution for some of the university's problems.

At that time there was a sharp decline in the number of students staying in the dormitories and the state was barely breaking even on the existing dorms due to maintenance costs.

The other issue was that Telegraph was occupied by a lot of hippies and the university

found that area undesirable.

Therefore the university tore down the more affordable off-campus housing that existed at the site, with plans to develop the land into unaffordable dormitories.

For the next two years, through eminent domain, the university demolished the housing that was there and uprooted many students. Here is what the area looked like (below).

The university obviously never actually created more housing at the location so students began to use it for parking.





This is where a man named Mike Delacour stepped in (above). Delacour was a local activist who advocated for a community park in Berkeley and soon others got on board with the idea and raised funds to help make that lot into a park.



On April 20th, 1969, a hundred people helped fix up the lot and created People's Park (above).

The chancellor did not take any notable action in order to prevent any of this from happening, besides stating that the university intended to proceed with development. However, on May 13th he announced that he was going to fence the park.

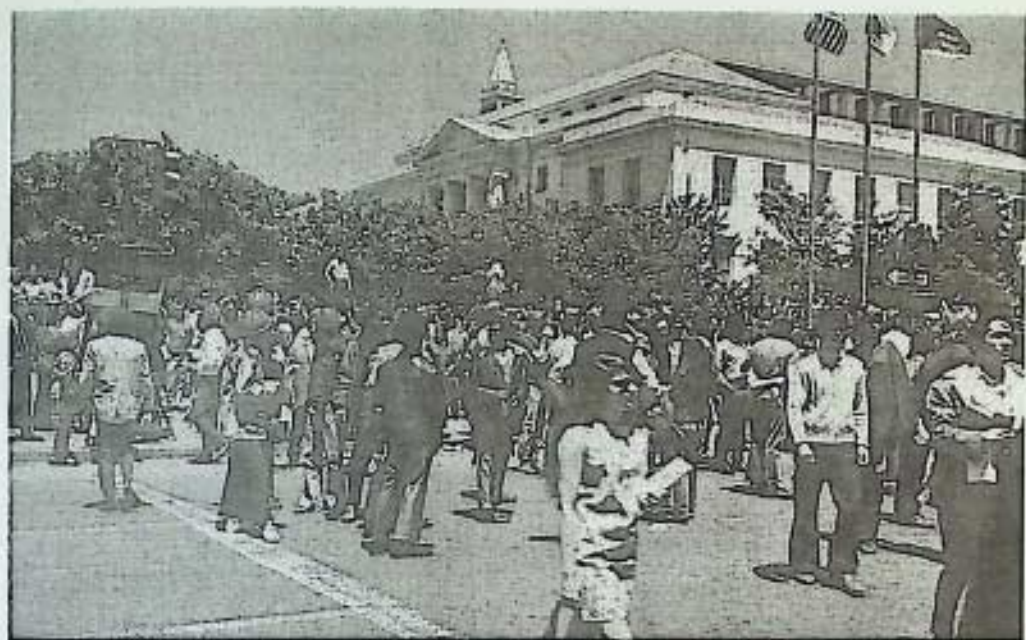
The major problem with this was that it practically invited Ronald Reagan to get involved. A few months before, Reagan had declared a state of emergency in Berkeley due to a student strike and authorized the presence of local and state police on campus.

Months later the decree was still in effect, and this all led to the event known as Bloody Thursday.

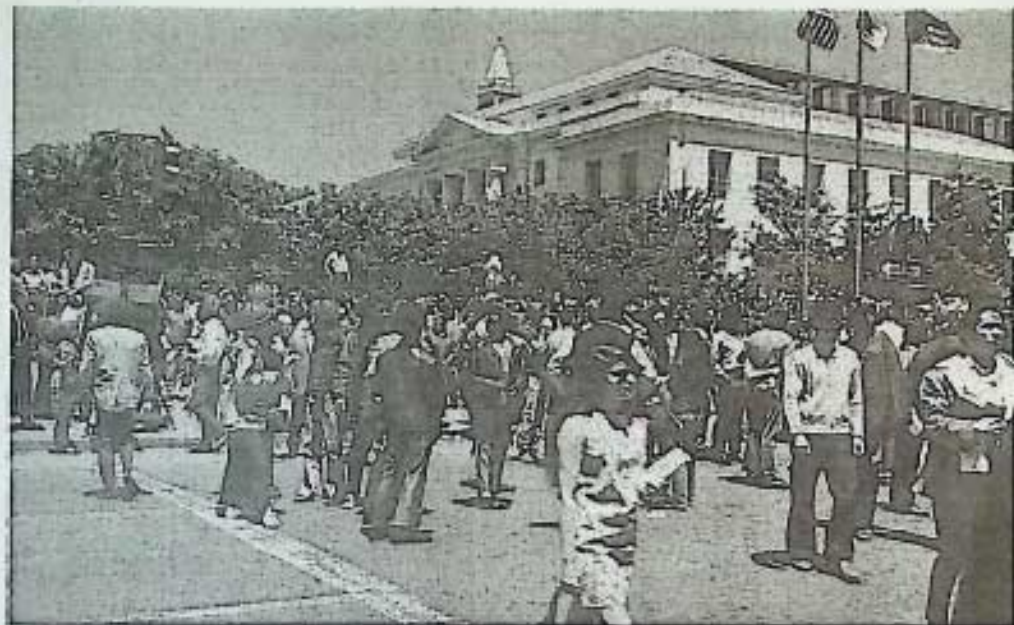
The project was led completely by the police since both the chancellor and vice-chancellor were out of town.

This is where things get crazy.

What is now known as Bloody Thursday began at dawn on May 15th, 1969 when the police went to evict less than a hundred protestors who were camping at the park. But by noon there were 2,000- 3,000 park supporters gathered on Sproul (right).



Photos via the Estate of Clay Geerdes



Photos via the Estate of Clay Geerdes

When the supporters reached Telegraph and Haste they were met by Berkeley police and CHP. Some were never able to reach the park and instead resorted to trashing buildings like the Bank of America (top right).

Police were hit with projectiles many of which they claimed were thrown from the top of buildings. In response, police mistakenly shot and killed James Rector (below).

By the end of the ordeal, 48 people were arrested and 62 were hospitalized, mostly with gunshot wounds.

In response Reagan declared martial law in Berkeley, instated, a curfew and get this- **BANNED GATHERINGS OF THREE OR MORE PEOPLE.**

Obviously, this violated the First Amendment and in response, protestors showed up and more than 800 mass arrests were made.

During this time Reagan actually tear-gassed the **ENTIRE** city (bottom right).

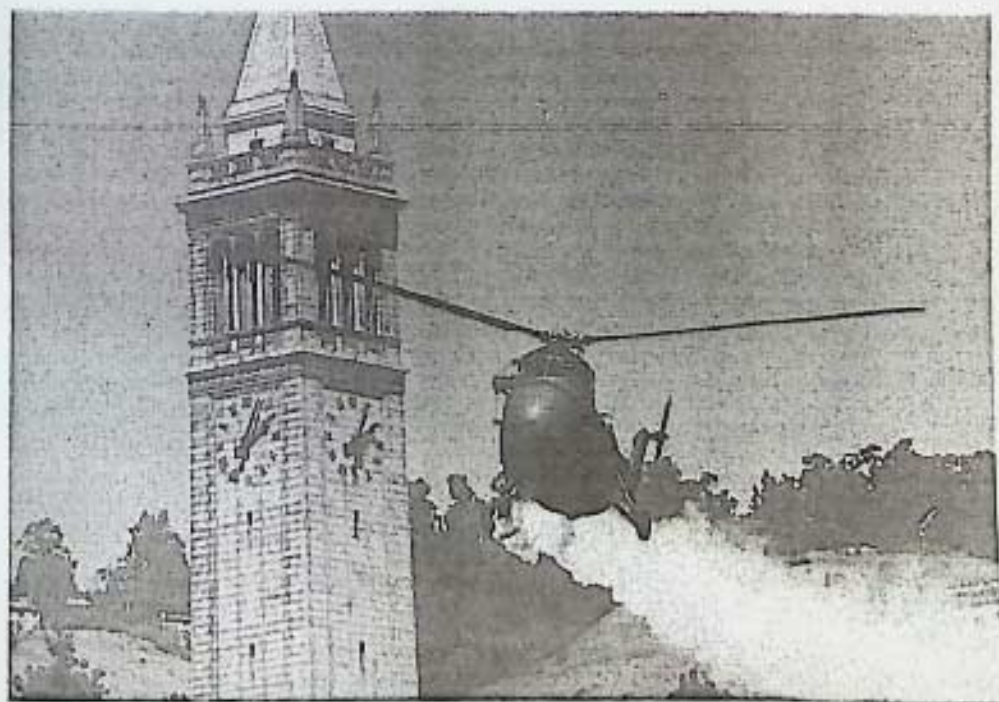
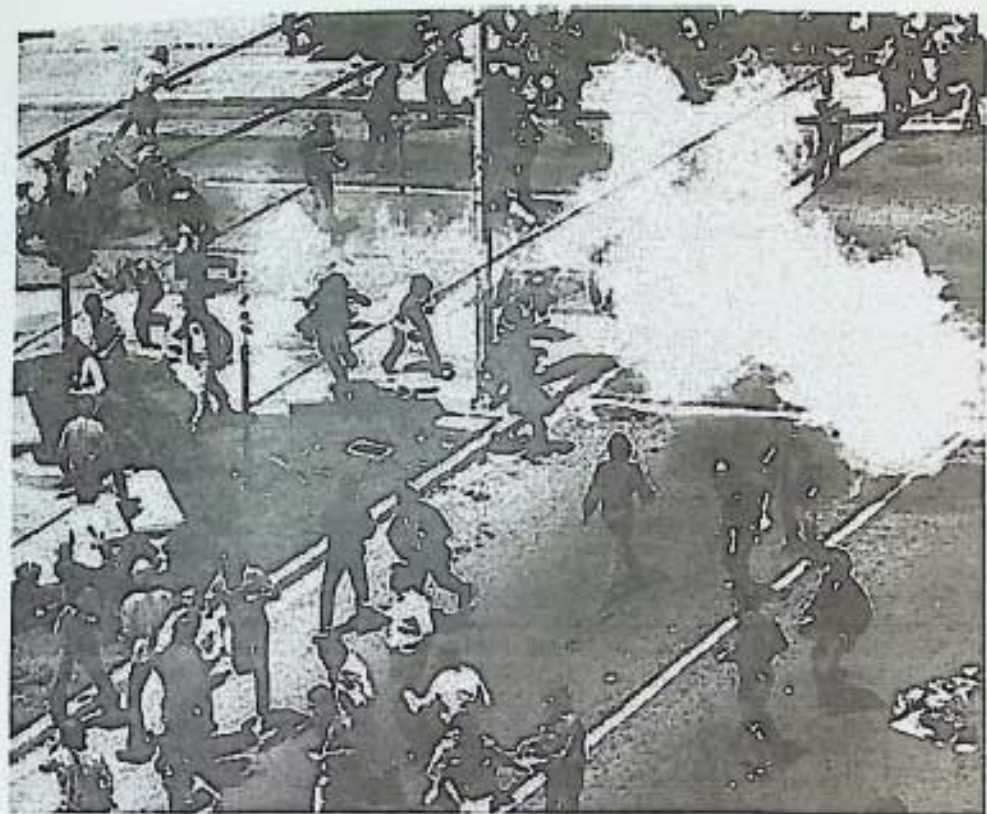
On a state and national

level, Reagan was applauded and he used these events to gain the leverage needed to become the President of the United States.

Eventually, the Academic Senate voted to remove the fences, and later it was decided that the property would be leased to the city of Berkeley for communal use.

Roughly once every ten years the UC Berkeley tries to eliminate the park. They even warn freshmen of its "dangers" in order to indoctrinate a bias against the space. Its current state is due to the admin's gross negligence and the continuous removal of any communal efforts to improve the space and provide resources for both its residents and our community as a whole.





PEOPLE'S PARK & THE BERKELEY FREE CLINIC

As a member of the 50-year-old Berkeley Free Clinic, I am compelled to add some history on it's connection to the Park. Although it is not included in this excerpt, legend has it that during the People's Park Riots, "police barged up the stairs [of the field hospital] hunting for escaped rioters, throwing a medic and an x-ray machine down the stairs. And so the clinic was born." (Adapted by Elena from Scottosaurus in 1998)

Excerpt from "Beyond the free clinics origin myth: Reconsidering free clinics in the context of 1960s and 1970s social movements and radical health activism" by Nibbe, Niki A., M.A.

Although the clinic was scheduled to open [...] on June 16th, the Battle for People's Park led the clinic to open its doors early.

When the Park was established on April 20th, Mike Baxter, a longtime Free Church staff member and medic trained by Chuck McAllister, opened a first aid station in the park. Thanks to York's involvement with negotiations over the park - he was appointed by

"the Movement" to represent them on the Negotiating Committee -the Free Church learned on May 14th that the University would be reclaiming the park the next day.

Expecting trouble, the Free Church contacted McAllister. He was teaching a course in medical training that spring on the Berkeley campus through the UC Center for Participatory Education. (These were student-initiated courses, open to the general public.) McAllister set up an extensive first aid station at the Free Church and worked with Baxter to coordinate medic stations at the park and in the surrounding areas, and the Free Church began advertising McAllister's first aid course at Berkeley.



After a noontime rally on May 15th, thousands of people marched down Telegraph to re-take the park. Police began gassing and clubbing protestors, and eventually broke out their shotguns.

Many people were hit by shotgun pellets, and a bystander, James Rector, was killed. Helicopters gassed the campus and the Avenue. The governor, Ronald Reagan, called out the National Guard. Meanwhile, McAllister and the Free Church organized doctors, nurses and medics to provide care for the injured. McAllister also persuaded the Berkeley Public Health Department (via Weissman) to release Civil Defense Administration supplies to assist with treatment of injured protestors.

Two weeks of street battles and escalating violence by law enforcement ensued. The Free Church continued to serve as a field hospital for the injured, and Chuck McAllister

first aid stations, and they estimated that McAllister had trained and/or was coordinating an astounding 500 medics. Some of these medics joined Mike Baxter and his wife in their newly formed "Revolutionary Community Medical Corps," which also used the Free Church as its organizing base.

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@peoplesparkberkeley on IG

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continued to organize medical emergency street teams and first aid as well as training hundreds of people as medics. At the height of the People's Park protests, the Free Church had at least 10 private autos in use as ambulances and 5

WHOSE PARK? PEOPLE'S PARK!

WHY PEOPLE'S PARK? A BRIEF HISTORY

In 1964 students from the University of California at Berkeley erected information tables supporting the struggle for civil rights in the deep south. The university banned these tables and the students responded with a large peaceful sit-in. Thus the Free Speech Movement was born. The police reacted with what many witnesses described a riot inflicting many injuries and arresting 700 people. The tense period following was aggravated by popular revulsion for the Draft and the Viet-Nam War. During this time U.C., unnecessarily and some say illegally used the state power of eminent domain to seize most of a block of apartment houses at the site now known as People's Park. Subsequently hundreds of people including many activists were summarily thrown out of their homes and the buildings destroyed. In 1969 the community and the students threw down the fences, dug up the concrete and declared the site public land - People's Park. The police with help from the military attacked causing one death, one blinding, many serious injuries including 110 shot, with over 600 arrests. The park prevailed and to this day serves as a symbol of resistance to U.C.'s active support for war - be it violations of international treaties like the National Ignition Facility (nuclear weapons) in Livermore, or general research and recruitment for regional conflicts such as Viet-Nam, Iraq and Kosovo. People's Park also is a reminder that the Berkeley Community is tired of U.C. 'gobbling up our town. U.C. has confiscated large amounts of taxable land all over town and wounds the social fabric of our community. People's Park also serves the real need for open space and user-development. People's Park - rich in history - still needed - still relevant - and a nice place to hang out. Enjoy it - improve it - it's ours.

Mark McDonald with help from W. Mandel
and others

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