

BOB POTTER'S SPEECH  
AT THE CEREMONY DEDICATING  
THE MONUMENT  
TO THE WORLDWIDE PEACE MOVEMENT  
DURING THE VIETNAM WAR ERA  
IN ISLA VISTA'S PERFECT PARK,  
JUNE 10, 2003.

A third of a century ago, our forefathers...and foremothers—and fore-motherfuckers—hippies and yippies; speed freaks and Jesus freaks;



UCSB Professor Bob Potter giving this speech on June 10, 2003. Potter was the chair of the Perfect Park Monument Implementation Committee and the co-author of The Campus By the Sea Where the Back Burned Down (1970), a report to the President's Commission on Campus Unrest on the disturbances in Isla Vista and at UCSB, 1968-70. Photograph courtesy of Robert Bernstein.

Students radicalized by their professors; Professors radicalized by their students; Anarchists, Pacifists and Registered Republicans; Flower Children, Franciscan Friars and pissed-off Football Players; Marxist-Leninists and Proto-Feminists; Surfers, Sorority Sisters and Sexual Revolutionaries; Space Cadets and Vietnam Vets; the Hare Krishna and the Woodstock Nation; Visionaries in all colors and Mindblown lead guitarists of non-existent bands; not to mention winos, transients, alcoholics Anonymous and Otherwise, the Chairman of the Sociology Department and ordinary college students caught up in the pure adrenaline of the moment —

All of these people, and indescribable hundreds more, made history with their asses, by sitting down on them here in Perfect Park, in violation of a Police Curfew Order, linking arms to defend their community.

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What could have brought so many unlikely people — including more than a few still alive here in this audience — to that outlandish act of defiance? Tonight, exactly 33 years later, it is worth looking back briefly, and as unsentimentally as possible under the circumstances, to remember what a hell of a mess things had gotten into.

To begin with, there was the **Vietnam Crisis**. By early 1968, with the February Tet Offensive, the American public had begun to wise up to the fact it had been lied to (does that sound familiar?) and that the Vietnam War had become unwinnable, though young Americans continued to be drafted and killed in action by the thousands. This quickly brought on a **Political Crisis**, as President Lyndon B. Johnson was driven from the race in that Presidential Election Year by antiwar activists led by Eugene McCarthy and later Bobby Kennedy — whose assassination after the California primary in June brought chaos and deceit in its wake, a tumultuously rigged Democratic Convention and a bloody police riot in the streets of Chicago. And this coincided with a perilous turning point in the **Racial Crisis** in America. The non-violent insurgence of the Civil Rights movement to overturn segregation ended in calamity, with the murder of Martin Luther King on April 4, 1968, touching off catastrophic urban riots across the country, and calls for Armed Struggle. The backlash from all of this brought the election in November of Richard Nixon as President of the United States.

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It was in the long shadow of these events that activism — violent and non-violent — came to the sunny shores of Santa Barbara. Thanks to the EOP program, an early example of Affirmative Action, the previously lily-white UCSB campus was integrated — though the Black students who arrived were unhappy enough with their treatment by campus bureaucracy and local law enforcement that one day they took over North Hall — the campus Computer Center! That every bit of the campus' computing went on in one small building tells you how long ago that was. The peaceful settlement worked out by the UCSB administration, brought the promise of more minority faculty and students, and new Black Studies and Chicano Studies Departments— but triggered a vicious denunciation from Governor Ronald Reagan, who had won his job in the first place by attacking student demonstrators at Berkeley, an ongoing **Educational Crisis**.

Concurrently an **Environmental Crisis** had erupted, with the Santa Barbara Oil Spill of January 1968, the single worst ecological disaster of our times, and the opening gun in a war of attrition between developers and environmentalists that continues along this coast to this very day. The oil-soaked dead birds on the beach turned surfers and ordinary beach goers overnight into radical activists.

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Meanwhile, thanks to the baby boom, UCSB had doubled its enrollment between 1954 and 58, doubled it again by 1963, and again by 1967. Too busy building classrooms to bother with dormitories, the University solved its problems by steering this avalanche of students into substandard overcrowded apartment houses thrown up overnight by private land speculators and slum landlords, creating a demographic dystopia called Isla Vista, and precipitating a **Housing Crisis** (well, there's always a Housing Crisis in Isla Vista).

And all of this, let's remember, was unfolding generationally in the throbbing context of the **Countercultural Crisis** of the 1960's, that sexually-pioneering, musically-energized, chemically-induced metaphysical vision quest and psychedelic light show. Oh, you should have been here!

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But if you were, you'll remember the pain and disillusion of it too. Woodstock led on to Altamont. Repression and violence were as American as Apple Pie, as Black militant H. Rap Brown pointed out. There were signs of trouble locally as early as 1969, with the arrest of 7 Black student leaders by the

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Santa Barbara Sheriffs on the pretext of an eviction notice, bringing student demonstrators out by the thousands. And April of that year brought the first death, when a bomb set off in the Faculty Club killed an innocent custodian, named Dover Sharp — a senseless violent crime still unsolved.

In the fall came news of the firing of a popular (and decidedly countercultural) Anthropology professor. The **Bill Allen Crisis**, which culminated in massive demonstrations and a petition signed by 7,776 students demanding an open hearing on his personnel case, was at once a carnivalesque assault on academic pomposity and a serious protest against

the ivory tower obliviousness of much of the faculty, at a time when the world seemed literally to be coming apart. Bill Allen had the temerity to speak to students about what was on (and in) their minds, and it seemed he had been fired precisely for doing so.

And speaking of injustice, there were nightly TV news clips of the bizarre show trial of the Chicago Seven, with Judge Julius Hoffman railroading criminal Conspiracy charges against antiwar activists who barely knew one another, with Black leader Bobby Seale gagged and bound in the courtroom. At the

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year's end, as Tom Hayden, one of the defendants, came to speak on campus, a **Crisis of Justice** was palpable across America. Could we trust our traditional institutions, or were they in the process of failing us, precipitating anarchy and revolution — or maybe fascism?

It was in such incendiary times that **Isla Vista** burst into flames 33 years ago, putting this most improbable trouble spot on the world map forever after. In the first few months of 1970 there were to be three major civil disorders.

In January came huge campus protests against the firing of Bill Allen, and the calling of Santa Barbara Sheriffs to clear the Administration Building of protestors, with Captain Joel Honey, the loose cannon of the Sheriffs Tactical Squad, leading the charge. As Allen's appeal for an open hearing was turned down, with the arrest of 19 student leaders, matters careened off campus and out of control. On February 26, after a rousing speech by William Kunstler, the lawyer for the Chicago Seven, and the beating of student leader Rich Underwood by police, crowds gathered in the Isla Vista streets and attacked Realty Offices and the Bank of America, seen as the prime local symbol of the Establishment. Later that night, having chased off the police presence, the crowd set a fire in the lobby of the bank and then watched in amazement as the place burned to the ground.

The ashes of the bank were still smoldering the next day as Governor Ronald Reagan arrived in town to vilify the bank burners as "cowardly little bums" and call in the National Guard. The Bank of America took out nationwide full-page advertisements offering a \$25,000 reward for the arrest of the arsonists, vowing to rebuild the bank. Reagan's call for a campus crackdown seemed to be heeded shortly afterwards, when Chancellor Vernon Cheadle banned Chicago Seven defendant Jerry Rubin from speaking on campus, saying it would "seriously threaten the welfare of the University." Unappeased,

Reagan made a speech to a Growers Convention on April 7, in which he made the following infamous statement about campus disorders: "If it's to be a bloodbath, let it be now."

It seemed he didn't have long to wait. On April 16, after a campus speech by Berkeley radical Stu Albert calling on students to "rip off the pigs," there was an angry rally in Perfect Park, then a vacant lot at the end of the Embarcadero loop that had become an informal community gathering place. As night fell the new temporary bank was attacked, as were realty offices; other students — protesting the violence — defended the bank and extinguished fires. The police waded into the middle of this melee, firing tear gas and birdshot into the crowd indiscriminately, from dump trucks specially outfitted for the

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occasion — an action that was dubbed “Operation Wagontrain”. The next night the violence (and the resistance against it) resumed — with tragic consequences. As police arrived in riot gear, amid reports of sniper fire, anti violence students were attempting to defend the temporary bank from assault. One of them, Kevin Moran, was shot and killed.

KCSB the campus radio station was covering these events live, with reporters in the field, as they had in previous demonstrations. Fearing that the reports were giving away police tactics and deployments, Sheriff James Webster demanded that the University authorities close down the station — an order with which Vice Chancellor Steven Goodspeed complied. So it was that the only recorded silencing of a radio station by government order in American history took place, right over there on the UCSB campus. The death of Moran was attributed to snipers, and a dawn-to-dusk curfew was imposed, with heavy police patrols and reports of beatings and apartments broken into. On April 20, as Governor Reagan made a speech blaming Moran's killing on those who “take the law into their own hands,” it was revealed that a Santa Barbara policeman had admitted that his rifle had “accidentally” discharged at the time of Moran's shooting. In a subsequent Coroner's inquest, held with little public scrutiny, the shooting of

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Kevin Moran would be ruled to be accidental, and the policeman,

Officer David Gosselin, exonerated and returned to duty.

Less than two weeks later President Nixon astonished the world, escalating the Vietnam War by invading Cambodia. The resulting firestorm of protest spread from coast to coast. At Kent State, Ohio National Guard troops fired

into a crowd of protesting students, killing 4 of them. UCSB students occupied and closed the Santa Barbara airport, and surged onto the 101 Freeway, blocking it for many hours. As universities across the country began to close down, the UCSB faculty was energized at last, moving quickly and effectively to keep our community together, by offering special “national crisis” courses focusing on the circumstances of the times.

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It seemed that the school year might end quietly, but events intervened once again. On June 3 news leaked out that 17 people — student leaders and activists, the “usual” suspects — had secretly been indicted, accused of burning down the Bank of America. One of those indicted had in fact been in jail the night of the bank burning. The resulting outrage led to further street and campus demonstrations, including attempts to torch the temporary bank. With disorder in Isla Vista once again, State officials, apparently acting on instructions from Governor Reagan's office, ordered the Los Angeles County Sheriffs to dispatch their Special Enforcement Branch to restore order. Instead, this notoriously violent paramilitary outfit, which had cracked heads in many urban riots, brought a reign of terror into Isla Vista. On June 8 and 9, enforcing a dusk-to-dawn curfew, the LA Sheriffs, accompanied by local law enforcement units, kicked down doors, dragged Isla Vistans from their houses, beat them bloody with their nightsticks, sexually harassed and intimidated, destroyed vehicles and personal property, sprayed mace and threw tear gas canisters into private yards and dwellings, threatening to shoot to kill.

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*At this very dark moment came Isla Vista's finest hour. With their streets under siege the next day, June 10, a group of faculty, student and community leaders met in the Methodist to seek a collective strategy. They decided to organize a sit-in in Perfect Park that night, to protest the police repression.*

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social and political persuasions. When the police began arresting them for curfew violations, they reacted with calm, non-violent acceptance in the tradition of Gandhi and Martin Luther King. At 9:20, with nearly 300 arrested, police ordered the remaining crowd to disperse. When no one moved, the police sprayed pepper gas from a machine directly into the crowd. Then, as the Santa Barbara *News-Press* described it the next day, “gas-masked deputies swarmed into the crowd, flailing their nightsticks

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in all directions.” Those arrested were hauled away to the still-unfinished New County Jail where many were subjected to further beatings, denied bail, abused, stripped naked, sprayed with mace and thrown into solitary confinement.

But a crucial moral point had been made. Judge Joseph Lodge ordered charges dismissed against all those arrested and, faced with an ultimatum from University officials, Governor Reagan agreed to end the curfew and withdraw the L.A. Sheriffs. Peace returned to the streets of Isla Vista. The promised bloodbath had been averted, and the task of creating new institutions for the Isla Vista community had begun.

In the aftermath of the 1970 riots, a whole array of community institutions came into being in Isla Vista. The IV Recreation and Park District would go on to become a dynamic force in the establishment of parks and other public venues for the first time, along with the dream of cityhood (with or without Goleta). The University began to provide funds, and pay belated if sporadic attention to its unruly stepchild; one tangible result was the IV Foot Patrol, putting officers into direct daily contact with the community. Also established were the IV Credit Union, the IV Medical Clinic (bringing the inimitable Dr. Dave Bearman to town), the Isla Vista Youth Projects, and the IV Food Co-op, which remain vital and highly-valued institutions to this day. In short a true community was born, out of the courage and solidarity of the Perfect Park sit-in.

It was in an effort to commemorate that event, and in a larger sense the spirit of peaceful protest that is the most important legacy of the Vietnam era, that some visionaries set out in the early 1990s to create a Monument in Perfect Park. They had to begin by saving the Park itself!

Perfect Park had been purchased in the 1970s by a Santa Monica doctor who wanted to build a Safeway Supermarket. Only the long Goleta Water moratorium prevented him from doing so. In 1992



One of the 1,000 non-violent demonstrators in Isla Vista's Perfect Park being hauled off to jail on June 10, 1970. This Isla Vista Slide Show photograph was used in the campaign to raise money to build the monument in Perfect Park to the anti-war movement around the world.

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— eleven years ago! — Isla Vista voters approved a referendum saving Perfect Park from the developers, and two years later the Park District bought the property. Carmen Lodise, the historian and unofficial *Alcalde* of Isla Vista, was probably the first to propose building a monument to the anti-war movement on the site. That Carmen was proposing it guaranteed that certain other people would oppose it — and so indeed they did. Critics denounced the whole idea as an attempt to glorify bank-burners and bomb-throwers, waste taxpayers' money and enrich unspecified cronies.

In 1995 — eight years ago! — the IV Park District decided to appoint a committee to study the issue, including both proponents and opponents. Against my better judgment (I had, after all, co-authored a book on the IV Riots) I applied to join it. Despite our disagreements we held some useful public forums and learned that the IV community generally liked the idea. Most thought it should be a positive symbol for Peace, to unite rather than divide the community.

When the committee was reconstituted in 1996 we adopted a mission statement that made clear our commitment to honoring peaceful protest. We further decided that the monument should be built with private donations rather than public funds — a noble idea, though easier said than done. And as for what the thing should look like, there were dozens of conflicting strong opinions. A consultation with the County Art Commission yielded the bright idea of a national design competition, which of course we couldn't afford to finance. Here the amazing people at the Fund For Santa Barbara came to our rescue in 1997, funding a \$3,800 grant, which enabled us to reach artists all over the country.

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To vet the entries we appointed a Selection Committee of arts professionals and community representatives (including John Muir, a combat veteran of the Vietnam war, who is here today). In June 1998 — five years ago! — the committee picked 6 finalists, who were given \$500 grants to build models of their proposed monument designs. The following year, as fund raising began with a goal of \$20,000, we held three public exhibitions of the models, on campus and in IV, gathering input and reactions to the designs; Santa Barbara artist Colin Gray's design for a cluster of arches proved to be the public favorite. In May 1999 — four years ago! — our committee voted to recommend Colin's design be built, and the IV Park District Board accepted the recommendation, authorizing the monument to be built on Park District land here in Perfect Park. Now all we had to do was raise \$20,000.



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Thanks to a flock of small donations, and a few large ones (thank you, Michael Douglas, and Richard and Tekla Sanford, for your \$1,000 checks!) plus two generous grants of \$2,500 from the IV Community Relations Council of the UCSB Associated Students, we had by June of 2001 — two years ago! — raised some \$13,000.

They say that everything changed after September 11, 2001. That was indeed the case with our project. Suddenly, with the war in Afghanistan, a Peace Monument began to seem like a timely idea, rather than an exercise in nostalgia. People who had written us off as a bunch of aging hippies began to understand what we were up to, and pay attention. In January Congresswoman Lois Capps lent her name and support to our effort, speaking at a campus gathering where Colin's model was displayed, with television coverage from KEYT. In May 2002 — just a year ago! — filmmaker and film critic Peter Biskind came to town to show his infamous documentary *Don't Bank on Amerika* and help us raise over \$3,000, and someone found a stash of old Burning Bank Check Posters and donated them to the cause.

As the Bush administration began its push toward war with Iraq, our small Peace project rode the wave of public outrage and protest as the Peace movement came alive all across the globe. Daniel Ellsberg came to town and joined our honorary board of advisors, which by then included Dick Flacks, David Krieger, Tom Hayden, Marc McGinnis, David Smith and Terence Hallinan. In February of this year, as the war clouds gathered, the L.A. *Times* ran a prominent feature story on our project.

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That same week, — less than four months ago! — still \$9,000 shy of our new goal of \$25,000, I picked up the telephone to find that I was speaking with someone who wanted the Perfect Park Peace Monument to be built — and had the courage and the money to make it happen. Thanks to that visionary donor — who has insisted on remaining anonymous! — we received an astonishing pledge of \$9,000 and broke ground in April.

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So thanks to all the hundreds of people who made this possible — Diane Conn, Dave Bearman and Carmen Lodise still on the committee, and all the others who served time on it, including Mitch Stockton, Karl Brunner, Brent Foster, Dave Fortson, Leila Salazar, Ariana Katovich and untold others. And let's not forget someone whose reckless and disastrous actions put our initiative back on page one, and turned the Peace movement from a distant memory to an international necessity — President George W. Bush!

But finally our thanks must go to the people who, 33 years ago tonight, made a commitment to non-violence and kept it so memorably, who took a beating unflinchingly, looked repression in the face, and pepper gas in the eye — the people who made this ground historic when they put their asses on the line.

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*The wording on the plaque in  
the center of the monument  
reads:*

*In a spirit of remembrance,  
inspiration and reconciliation,  
we commemorate the people  
who worked for peace, justice  
and nonviolence in Isla Vista  
and elsewhere during the  
Vietnam war era.*

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The monument to the worldwide anti-war movement in Isla Vista's Perfect Park was dedicated on June 10, 2003, exactly 33 years after club-wielding police broke up a peaceful demonstration on this spot. These events are described on pages 23-25 in the book Isla Vista: A Citizen's History (2008) by Carmen Lodise & Friends.