

# THE SANTA CRUZ DREAM

UCSC may not have lived up to its original vision, but the light still shines

UCSC - History - 1965 to 1969

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The late Clark Kerr was president of the University of California from 1958 to 1967. Kerr, who died Monday, published Volume I of *The Gold and The Blue*, his memoir, in 2001. The following regarding the founding and development of UCSC is excerpted from that book.

By CLARK KERR

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My wife Kay and I went to Santa Cruz in September 1965 to participate in the first full meeting of students and faculty in the field house, which served at first as a dining hall.

Afterward, we went from trailer to trailer where the students were housed pending completion of residence halls. It was a beautiful evening with warm breezes blowing in from the ocean. There was a full moon. The students welcomed us with such enthusiasm and expres-



## Inside

■ Clark Kerr's vision changed the course of Santa Cruz.

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students), each teaching some version of the liberal arts, each college with its own provost, and each faculty member with a college connection. Fifty percent of the students, not the standard University of California 25 percent, would be residential.

The Santa Cruz plan started out in an especially difficult situation. The campus was located in the shadow not only of Berkeley but also of Stanford, and was bound to remain in their shadows for a very long time to come and perhaps forever. So it needed a distinctive personality to attract and retain students and faculty members, and it had to flourish as first rate within its own type.

McHenry and I offered it such a possibility. As it turned out, too many faculty members wanted to

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with such enthusiasm and expressions of appreciation for what we were doing for them. Some wrote poems for us. It was for Kay and me one of the greatest evenings of our lives.

Four years later, in June 1969, I accepted an invitation from these same students to give the address at their commencement: I was then the university's former president, they were the first four-year graduating class. Recalling that earlier enchanted evening, I went with high expectations. I found the situation totally changed.

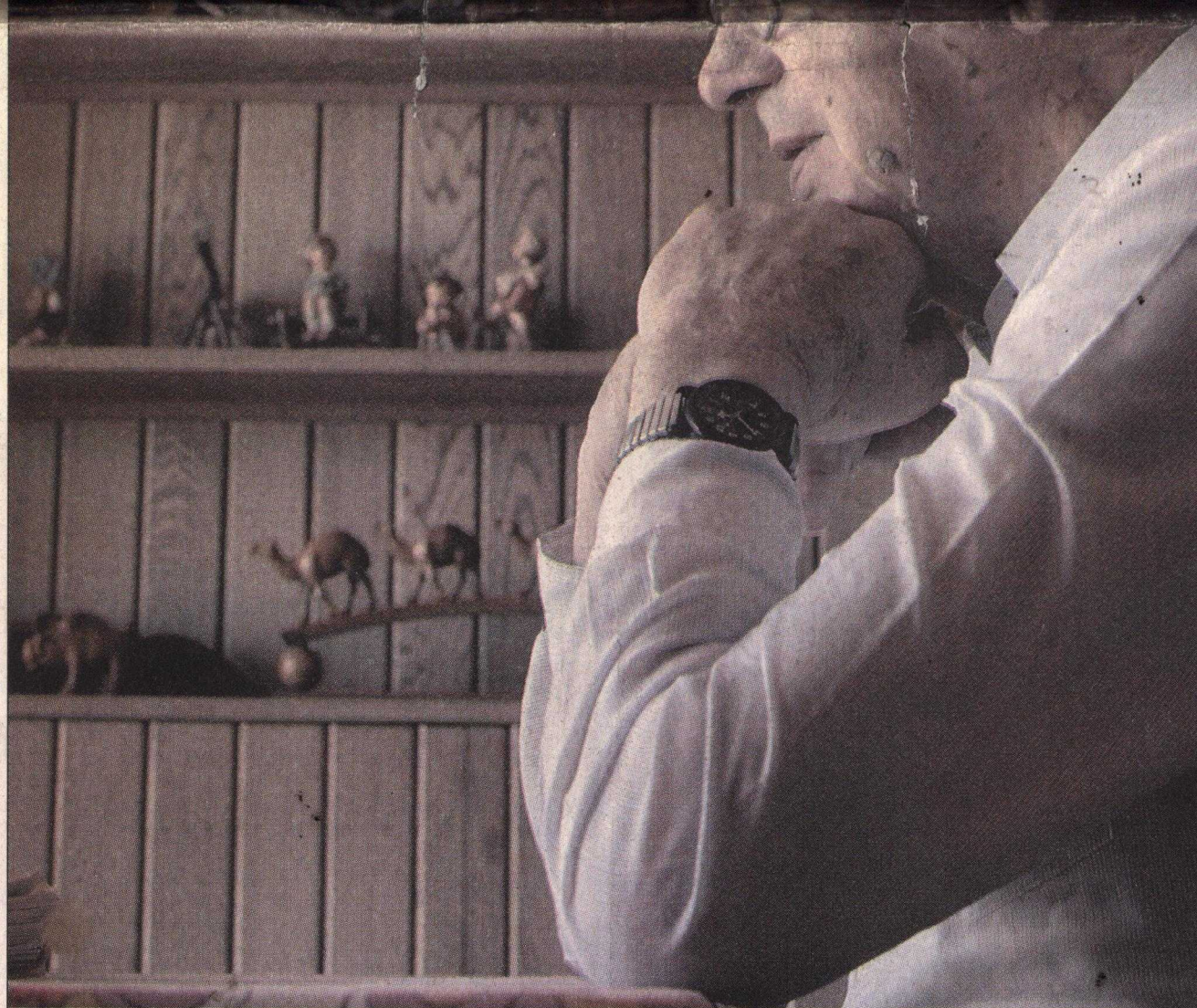
As students received their diplomas and then walked by Chancellor Dean McHenry and me on the state, some of them expressed their contempt for us by throwing their diplomas at us. Then a group of students took over and turned the occasion into "guerrilla" theater. Their leaders said that McHenry and I had planned and created Santa Cruz as a capitalist-imperialist-fascist plot to divert students from their revolution against the evils of American society and, in particular, against the horrors of the Vietnam War.

They gave an "honorary degree" in absentia to a Black Panther (Huey Newton) who was in jail charged with murder. They then turned to the audience asking it to rise in appreciation of the contributions of this Black Panther. The students mostly all rose. The leaders then motioned to the parents sitting in a large circle behind the students, but no one rose. Then they turned to the faculty in front and almost all members rose one by one until nearly all were standing except for a small group.

When I was called upon to speak, I put aside my written comments and spoke to the occasion. I said that it had been a long and "hot" afternoon and I was not going to add to either the length or the heat of the occasion. That, however, I would like to make two brief comments.

One, with reference to Alice in "Through the Looking Glass" — when she asked a man gazing into the far distance what he saw, he replied, "Nothing," and Alice then said what wonderful eyesight he must have to be able to see nothing and at such a great distance — was what wonderful eyesight McHenry and I must have had in the 1930s as graduate students at Stanford, when the "Santa Cruz dream" first occurred to us, to see the Vietnam War and student revulsion when we were so far away.

The second comment was that I was in sympathy with their views about the Vietnam War (I was at that time national chair of an anti-war but pro-American group called Committee for a Political Settlement in Vietnam) but thought that their means of protest were very counterproductive and hoped that they would give some thought to whether or not the means they used were in accord with the high ideals they professed to hold. I then sat down.



Associated Press file

Former University of California President Clark Kerr is shown in June 2002 in El Cerrito. Kerr, who oversaw the UC system's massive expansion to accommodate baby boomers but later was fired by then-Gov. Ronald Reagan for allegedly being too soft on student protesters, died in his sleep Monday after complications from a fall, according to UC officials. He was 92.

*In the end, I have concluded that the best that can be expected realistically of Santa Cruz is the goal set by current Chancellor M.R.C. Greenwood in her inaugural address as chancellor on May 23, 1997: 'Solidify our position as one of the best universities in the nation in which to gain a baccalaureate degree.' Only I would say more cautiously, solidify our position as one of the best public universities.*

What impressed me was how such a high proportion of the faculty had stood on their feet to applaud the students who were attacking the campus the faculty had by then created. It was one of the worst afternoons of my life.

### The dream begins

The Santa Cruz campus was the most significant educational experiment in the history of the University of California.

The idea of Santa Cruz goes back to the ancient Greeks, to the Academy of Plato and the Lyceum of Aristotle:

a place for high-level contemplation and discussion of the human experience in its manifold complexities, among small groups of teachers and students.

I had met Dean McHenry, the founding chancellor at Santa Cruz, accidentally. We stood together, by chance, in the registration line at Stanford in the fall of 1932 and started talking. We began comparing UCLA, from which he had come, and my Swarthmore (college), arguing the advantages of each.

He argued the advantages of the great library and active cultural programs at UCLA, and I the broad

learning experience and sense of community at Swarthmore. We always came to the consensus that both were worthwhile and could be combined.

Santa Cruz was an opportunity to start fresh, to create neoclassical colleges within a "multiversity."

The emphasis at Santa Cruz was to be on obtaining the advantages both of large scale (a big central library, centralized science laboratories, a wide range of cultural programs) and small scale (smaller size human and more integrated intellectual communities). To realize both we would build a series of colleges (500 to 1,000

many faculty members wanted to revert to the type of multiversity institution they had known in their graduate schools; a few others just wanted to frolic with the students in the redwoods. The "Santa Cruz dream" eroded, and no other new dream came along to take its place.

During the late 1960s, however, Santa Cruz was the most popular campus in the University of California, attracting students even from those who otherwise might have applied to Berkeley.

Santa Cruz's popularity had certain drawbacks. Experimental campuses draw experimental people — some of them uninterested in or intolerant of any experiment other than their own, others highly critical of the surrounding society, including the university — and Santa Cruz was the most experimental of the eight general campuses. The lack of students and faculty members in engineering and business administration, who tend to be more conservative in both the internal educational and the external political areas, intensified its distinctive cast. Also, McHenry and I, both farm boys, were not sensitive to how students and faculty members might react to its trees and meadows — a place for relaxation.

Because this academic experiment was taking place in the 1960s with its widespread student activism, it shared the unrest of campuses across the nation. Santa Cruz, almost alone among the experimental campuses, survived with strands of its dream intact. And the early alumni are among the most enthusiastic and loyal I have seen.

### A dream too far?

The "Santa Cruz dream" was a wonderful dream: that it should be possible to combine in the same public institution the best research and graduate training and the best circumstances for the intellectual and personal development of undergraduates.

For the first few years at Santa Cruz, the original highly talented students and equally talented and motivated faculty realized this dream. But then it faded. The time was not congenial: an age of Dionysus and of Che Guevara, and of millions of federal research dollars.

The place was not sufficiently compatible with the dream: a public university devoted to research and graduate study and dominated by its subject matter departments. A student body increasingly intent at first mostly on the counterculture and then on good jobs, and drawn from middle-income families not able or willing to finance added facilities, such as reading libraries; and a student body whose composition was shifting from high-ability toward middle-ability intellects. A university with a high ratio of students to faculty members



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and a low ratio of resources to students, as compared with the best private universities.

Given a more normal time and a better place (a wealthy private university with excellent students wanting a broad orientation to life and to thought), then the cluster college idea with neoclassical academic programs might

have worked out better.

I still hope, however, that it may be possible to develop "broad learning experience minors" to stand alongside narrow learning majors spread over the full four years of undergraduate life or at least the years 2, 3 and 4. That may not be a dream to far.

In the end, I have concluded that the best that can be expected realistically of Santa Cruz is the goal set by current Chancellor M.R.C.

Greenwood in her inaugural address as chancellor on May 23, 1997: "Solidify our position as one of the best universities in the nation in which to gain a baccalaureate degree." Only I would say more cautiously, solidify our position as one of the best public universities.

There is an "afterglow" to the original dream at Santa Cruz that makes this goal more possible. Many faculty members and students of today at Santa Cruz call atten-

tion to the comparatively greater concern for the welfare of individual students and the willingness of faculty members to step across disciplinary boundaries that still give Santa Cruz a special ambience.

However, in the end, I must confess my responsibility for the failure of the original Santa Cruz dream, for pursuing a dream so far, while noting that Santa Cruz is one experimental campus that has survived and that has many

accomplishments to its credit and a bright future.

*On April 17, 1999, Clark Kerr attended a reunion of the first graduating class at UCSC. "I have been to many class reunions," Kerr wrote. "None has ever matched the 30th of Santa Cruz's pioneer class."*

*At the event, he told them: "My wife, Kay, and I look back on that night when we first met you in September 1965 in the field house and visiting with you in your trailers after-*

*ward as one of the most enchanted evenings of our lives. The moon was shining and a soft breeze was wafting in from Monterey Bay. The redwoods were standing so tall. And the 'Santa Cruz Dream' was drawing us forward. The years pass on, but that memory never fades."*

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