

THE EASY CHAIR

A different kind of campus

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The experiment at Santa Cruz

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For three puzzling months this spring I worked at a unique institution: the new campus of the University at Santa Cruz. It is an experimental university, started only four years ago, which is different in its structure, living arrangements, and methods of instruction from any other in this country. Its students are a carefully-selected elite, as bright as you can find anywhere. Its site is matchless: two thousand acres of rolling hills, meadows, and redwood groves rising above the northern shore of Monterey Bay. For the most part, its faculty is young and enthusiastic. Up to this writing, it has not been bombed, burned, or besieged.

That is one of the things that puzzled me. The Santa Cruz students are just as anti-Establishment as anybody else, but their rebelliousness takes strange forms—quite different from the mode at Harvard, Columbia, Cornell, or Stanford, which is only fifty miles away. In some cases their behavior was so unexpected that I wrote it off, at first, as just another example of the well-known California kookiness. Later I began to suspect that it might be more profound than that, and more promising.

The more troubled students often are not very articulate; they tend to express their feelings (which they may not fully understand themselves) in dress and symbolic gesture rather than words. I may have misread some of their signals. In the end, however, I concluded that they are disenchanted not so much with their university as with the whole of American culture—especially the subculture of the wealthy California suburbs where they grew up. They don't want merely to sack the Dean's office; they want to prevent Los Angeles. Or, since they are too late for that laudable endeavor, to keep the world from committing another Los Angeles, ever again any-

where. If they can't forestall the crime, they are determined not to get implicated in it themselves.

"What we are trying to do," one of the more articulate ones told me, "is to experiment with alternative lifestyles, to build counter-cultures. We've had the affluent society. We have to believe that we can find something better."

Some of their experiments are comic, pathetic, or dangerous. Others will come to dead ends, because the student view of the world beyond the campus often is unbelievably myopic and oversimplified. But occasionally, I think, they may result in something valuable.

Santa Cruz does, of course, have its standard SDS-type radicals. One of them is Mark, who lives in a perpetual state of moral outrage. He sees that the American economy is capable of producing enough food, clothing, and decent homes for everybody. The fact that it has not done so proves to Mark that this is an evil society, unwilling to live up to its professed goals—and racist to boot, since so many of the poor are Negroes and Mexicans. He wouldn't believe it when I pointed out that even more of the poor are white; and if you mention the phenomenal gains made by black people in recent years, that only goes to prove his point. Why hadn't they been granted instant equality—economic, political, and social—generations ago? Obviously because the White Power Structure is hypocritical and wicked.

His ambition is to destroy that power structure, beginning with that part of it which is closest at hand, the

Santa Cruz campus. He is ashamed that his university has had no uprisings like those at Berkeley and San Francisco State. Oh, sure, a few students did try to disrupt a recent meeting of the board of regents, and on another occasion several hundred boycotted classes for a day in a symbolic protest. But these mild demonstrations fall far short of Mark's revolutionary goals.

One of his problems is that Santa Cruz students can't find much to revolt against. Unlike their peers at most state universities, they cannot complain that they are being processed in a vast, impersonal educational machine. Santa Cruz isn't vast—not yet. It has only 2,500 students, although it is expected to grow to more than ten times that number in the next twenty years. Neither is it impersonal. It was specifically designed to foster close personal relationships among students, and between them and their teachers. It is modeled on Oxford and Cambridge: that is, as a cluster of small, independent liberal-arts colleges with an average of six hundred students each. Unlike their British counterparts, however, each of these colleges is coeducational, so that boys, girls, and their preceptors live together as a community in spiritual and intellectual intimacy. (If other kinds of intimacy develop, nobody takes much notice.) Moreover, the faculty is encouraged to put more emphasis on good teaching than on research—a reversal of the usual, and rightly resented, custom.

There is no competition for grades, because the only grades given are "Pass" and "Fail." This has not, as some professors feared, led to sloppy academic performance. On the contrary, Santa Cruz's first four-year graduating class received six of the coveted Woodrow Wilson awards this spring—as compared with twelve each

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for Berkeley and Harvard-Radcliffe, which have senior classes many times as large.

Neither is there any ROTC, or Pentagon-financed research, favorite targets of militants at other universities. Moreover, the campus can expand indefinitely without displacing poor people from their homes, as Columbia and Harvard have done. When a new building goes up, nobody has to move except a few squirrels, and they can find plenty of low-cost, high-quality housing in the next clump of redwoods.

Mark likes to proclaim that the university administration is rigid and unresponsive, because the orthodox radical dogma says all administrations are like that. He doesn't sound altogether convincing, because the Santa Cruz administration is, in fact, permissive to the point of being unbuttoned. It makes few rules and those are seldom enforced. Pets are supposed to be banned from the colleges, for example, for sanitary reasons; but every quadrangle is aswarm with dogs and cats. One boy even keeps a couple of goats, and the girl who raises guinea pigs in her room posted a notice offering to give away her surplus stock. (A footnote read: "No sadistic scientists need apply.")

If a handful of students ask for a new course—in Zen, junk sculpture, the Japanese tea ceremony, or pottery—the administration is glad to oblige. When Government students decided that they wanted representation on the Board of Studies which controls the curriculum, their request was promptly granted. Another demand, that a new college be started specifically for black studies, also was warmly endorsed by the faculty; so was the suggestion that it be named "Malcolm X College."*

Under these circumstances, Mark has a hard time rallying other stu-

dents to his revolutionary standard. Besides, some of them feel that his self-righteousness is a little wearing.

"Mark thinks he invented morality," one youngster remarked. "He has stigmata instead of acne."

To work off some of his frustration, Mark has grown a Movement moustache and wears a Che Guevara costume. One night he and a few friends "liberated" the main courtyard of Adlai E. Stevenson College, and christened it Che Plaza with a bottle of mountain red wine. Nobody seemed to mind.

Stevenson would have enjoyed the ceremony, and the irony in the fact that their No. 1 hero is Che, the born loser—the most inept professional revolutionist since Béla Kun.

Successful revolutionists, such as Stalin and Mao, have few admirers at Santa Cruz. They were organization men, and any kind of organization is repellent because it implies discipline, which is the enemy of freedom and spontaneity.

The usual kind of student organization is almost nonexistent. There is no football team, nothing like a fraternity or debating society, no permanent political club. (One of the students in my Government seminar admitted, to my astonishment, that he had tried to get together a Young Republican Club before the 1968 election. Since then it has been "taking a rest." He was not socially ostracized, as he might have been had he supported the Democrats. Professing Republicanism is regarded as rather quaint, even an original way to be nonconformist.)

The horror of organization has doomed all efforts to found a good student newspaper. Nearly 20 per cent of the Santa Cruz students worked on high-school newspapers, and many claim to be interested in creative writing, but they have never been able to

*In this case the administration was not so enthusiastic as the students and faculty, for strictly financial reasons. Santa Cruz now has four colleges, with a fifth being built and two more on the drafting tables. The master plan calls for the addition of roughly one college a year, until the total reaches twenty. Most of the money will come from the taxpayers, but substantial private donations will of course be needed in addition.

To entice such gifts, the administration has been naming each new college for a big donor. The most recent, for in-

stance, is Merrill College, christened for the late Charles Merrill, whose foundation put up \$650,000. Is anybody likely to give a comparable sum in memory of Malcolm X? The administration doubts it—although a student-faculty committee is soliciting pledges. So far it has been promised something less than \$30,000 to help "buy the name."

Incidentally, if any reader of *Harper's* wants to memorialize himself, he should get in touch with Chancellor Dean McHenry. Fifteen opportunities for immortality are still available, if your price is right.

assemble a staff that could abide the deadlines, assignments, and editorial hierarchy necessary for a competent publication. There is an "official" (that is, printed) campus paper, and half-a-dozen "underground" (or mimeographed) publications which appear at irregular intervals, but none of them contains much news. *Purple Darts*, for instance, specializes in little essays about mysticism and macrobiotic diet. *Stevenson Libre*, which calls itself "UCSC's first student-controlled, non-bureaucratic newspaper," goes in for scatological poetry and denunciations of the Chancellor. ("Lullabies whispered in our ears by the menopausal and hairless father can no longer keep us asleep. We have been awakened by the sting of the lash. The patricidal ritual is now historically necessary.")

In fairness, I should add that *Libre* printed the only bit of conscious humor that appeared in any student publication while I was at Santa Cruz. Even that was second-hand: a reprint of a letter sent by the Warden and Fellows of Wadham College, Oxford, to a group of students who had presented a list of nonnegotiable demands. It read:

Dear Gentlemen: We note your threat to take what you call "direct action" unless your demands are immediately met. We feel that it is only sporting to let you know that our governing body includes three experts in chemical warfare, two ex-commandos skilled with dynamite and torturing prisoners, four qualified marksmen in both small arms and rifles, two ex-artillerymen, one holder of the Victoria Cross, four karate experts, and a chaplain. The governing body has authorized me to tell you that we look forward with confidence to what you call a "confrontation," and I may say even with anticipation.

In lieu of organizations, Santa Cruz generates spontaneous short-lived groups for the cause-of-the-week. A typical case is the handful of students who decided to stage a grape boycott, in support of striking migrant workers in the California vineyards. They picketed a supermarket in the town of Santa Cruz, about four miles from the campus, because it had ignored their demands that it stop selling grapes.

As it happens, the town is a lower-middle-class resort, a kind of two-bit

Atlantic City, whose permanent residents are largely old-age pensioners. They came there long before the university, because it is a warm and cheap place to while away what are known in California as The Golden Years. Naturally many of them are fearful of inflation, higher taxes, and change. They are apt to be supporters of Reagan, Rafferty, and the John Birch Society. Their pet hates are labor unions and hippies—a term they apply indiscriminately to anyone who is hairy and unconventionally dressed. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that the pickets stimulated the briskest sale of grapes the market ever had. Not much was heard about the boycott movement after that. It was superseded by other *ad hoc* groups agitating for Biafra, black studies, and the Chicano Liberation Movement.

Such enterprises help, apparently, to assuage the free-floating sense of guilt that saturates the campus. Lots of students, and some of the faculty, feel guilty because they are privileged, because they are not black, because only a few Negroes have been so far admitted to Santa Cruz, because of Vietnam, and (in the case of some boys) because they are *not* in Vietnam. They even feel guilty, sometimes, because they can't manage to hate the university.

"I know I ought to be protesting against an elitist institution like this," one girl remarked, "but the truth is I need it. You see, I never before felt that I belonged to any kind of community. My family kept moving so often that I never had any permanent friends, and then there was the divorce and all. I guess Cowell College is the nearest thing to a real home that I've ever had."

A by-product of these guilt feelings is Santa Cruz's enshrinement of The Black. Anything a Negro may say, however outrageous or silly, is accepted with uncritical reverence. This annoys some of the Negro students, who see it as an inverted form of white racism. They would feel more comfortable with less deference. Inevitably Dr. Herman Blake, the only Negro faculty member, has become a campus hero. Several white boys affect dashikis just like his. Probably he would have become a charismatic figure regardless of color, because he is a remarkably forceful lecturer—and; even more perhaps, because he is deeply involved with life beyond the academic world. Somehow he finds

time to work in any number of causes in the San Francisco Bay area.

Any such contact with The World Outside is valued by many students—perhaps because they have never known anything but the academic life, and suspect that they may be heading, willy-nilly, for academic careers themselves.

Two other campus heroes (there aren't many of them) are notably non-academic types. Al Johnsen never got beyond the eighth grade. The son of a Norwegian ship carpenter, he has been earning his own living since his teens—as a sailor, construction worker, and now as a potter. Twice a week he teaches a pottery class. The rest of his time he spends running the Big Creek Pottery, with his partner, Bruce McDougal, at an old dairy farm up in the mountains above the campus. Since their products are first-class—simple, durable, and well-designed—they have no trouble selling them all.

Al is craggy, tough, and a disciplinarian. No pupil leaves the workshop until his clay is put away and his wheel cleaned. The other classrooms, by contrast, are generally a shambles, littered with cigarette butts, soggy coffee cups, and discarded newspapers. Although they talk a lot about love and community, the undergraduates are entirely inconsiderate of each other, so far as tidiness goes. Aside from Al, no teacher ever hints that they might pick up after themselves. That would be square; moreover, to most teachers the only dirty four-letter word in the language is "Don't."

Though he doesn't seem to know it, Al's most valuable contribution is to demonstrate an acceptable life-style. "The only man I've ever met who knows how to live right" is the way one boy characterized him. He went on to explain that Al's profession is respectable to the young. (So are certain other "creative" crafts, such as leather-working and playing musical instruments; bookkeeping, selling insurance, and working for IBM are not.) Al looks suitably piratical, but also relaxed, casual, and obviously happy in his work and home life. He and his family raise their own vegetables, rabbits, goats, pigs, and chickens. They even know an Italian winemaker who delivers a good red wine in bulk, from door to door. Close to nature! Liberated from such as time clocks, computers, freeway traffic,

and the buttoned-down collar! Whee!

The other exemplar is Alan Chadwick, a onetime Shakespearean actor from England. He's not a faculty member, exactly—I'm told that he is carried on the payroll as a maintenance man—but nobody has a more devoted undergraduate following. He came to the university a few years ago to visit a faculty friend, and stayed to start The Garden.

This is an acre or so of formerly unused land where Chadwick and his disciples raise flowers, vegetables, chickens, and pigeons. Some of the produce they cook themselves, in a shack at the edge of the garden, for meals which seem almost sacramental. Everything is raised organically, without chemical sprays or fertilizers; for, like so many other Californians, the gardeners have a mystique about "natural" diet. The rest of the crop is given away. Each morning an armload of whatever flowers are in season is placed at a bus stop near the main entrance to the campus, so anyone who likes can help himself. The eggs and vegetables are available for the Chancellor's table, a student picnic, or people like myself who just drop by to ask for a head of lettuce. Only rhubarb is given reluctantly; the acolytes believe it has special properties—I never found out what—and prefer to save it for their own ceremonial occasions.

Chadwick, too, is a disciplinarian, who bosses his volunteer workers with gruff assurance. And, again like Al Johnsen, he is seen to be a man close to the earth, content with his world and himself. Several of the brightest students have dropped their classes to work with him full time.

Few regular faculty members command such reverence. A professor who was about to leave, gratefully, for two years in Madrid, told me that he was distressed because "my students rarely seem to have genuine respect for intellectual matters. They don't want to be taught. They want to be turned on." Another teacher is about to move to Dartmouth, where he hopes to find "a more serious and astringent atmosphere."

What turns them on, bright and clear, is mysticism. A favorite lecturer is Norman O. Brown, the apostle of the sensuous and irrational. And when Krishnamurti, the Norman Vincent Peale of India, delivered a series of four talks, he drew overflow crowds.

One of the student papers hailed the advent of this "renowned philosopher and mystic...independent of all authority, all affiliations" under a three-column headline, and announced that he would speak about the "possibility of total freedom...psychological freedom, which is mind freed from itself." Maybe he did. I wouldn't know, because at the one lecture I attended, he brought me to *satori* in the first five minutes and I spent the rest of the long, long evening in a state of *nirvana*. One of the student listeners, however, reported that Mr. K had been "real groovy," although he couldn't begin to tell me what the message was.

Almost equally large crowds kept turning out for other itinerant preachers, such as Timothy Leary, the priest of the LSD cult, and Tom Hayden, the grand old man of Students for a Democratic Society. Eventually it dawned on me that these students, hundreds of them, actually were searching for a new religion. The Judeo-Christian tradition is discredited, in their eyes, because it hasn't put an end to injustice, hypocrisy, racism, and war. Having abandoned Christian mysticism, they are hungry for another mystique to take its place. Some hope to find it in the Zen *koan* or Vedanta, others in occultism, drugs, sex, or the gospel according to Marcuse. What they seem to be reaching for, most of all and by whatever route, is intensity of feeling. As a consequence, they often sound anti-intellectual; for they see logical analysis and intellectual rigor as inhibitors of spontaneous response, sensory awareness, and warm human relationships.

They put me in mind of Arnold Toynbee's suggestion that we are now living in an era comparable to the late Hellenistic period, when the old Greco-Roman gods had lost their power, and new cults suddenly sprang up in wild profusion. I have no idea whether any of the present cults will emerge dominant, as Christianity finally overshadowed its competitors; but in their passionate seriousness, at least some of the current truth-seekers come close to emulating Paul.

Certainly the youngsters at Santa Cruz are the most unmaterialistic that I've ever met. Michael, for instance, is twenty-four years old and married but he has not yet begun to think what he will do for a living after his graduation next year. He really isn't interested in a job. Money, he apparently believes, is delivered by a stork; and

in any case he doesn't have much use for it. Like most of his fellow students, he grew up in a prosperous middle-class society, and he doesn't have any use for that either. He regards the *Sunset* magazine way of life, preoccupied with patios, sports cars, barbecue pits, and gracious manners, as trivial and false.

Michael prefers a life of voluntary poverty, and is practicing up for it. He goes barefoot most of the time, wears threadbare jeans and a second-hand Army jacket, and hasn't wasted a penny in a barbershop for years. He has no intention of getting encumbered with possessions, or entrapped in any-kind of rat race. What he has in mind is only relative poverty, of course; he can't imagine what it would be like actually to go hungry. But he is probably in no danger of that, since he is bright enough to earn the necessities somehow.

Some of the students who come from poor families are not quite so ready to put down affluence. Yet Michael's attitude seems to be reasonably typical of the Santa Cruz scene. The American Council on Education recently did a survey of the aspirations of college freshmen throughout

the country. It discovered that 41 per cent of them, nationwide, hope to become "very well off financially"—but at Santa Cruz less than 15 per cent admitted to such an ambition, and only 12 per cent wanted to "succeed in my own business." An overwhelming 92 per cent of the Santa Cruz freshmen reported that their most important goal is "to develop a philosophy of life." Seventy per cent also mentioned "helping others in difficulty."

My own class provided a happy illustration of the latter point. The middle part of Santa Cruz County is growing rapidly; its population probably will triple in fifteen years. But it has no effective government; today it is just an anarchic mess of villages, farms, scattered real-estate developments, and nondescript unincorporated areas. The county supervisors are thinking of organizing a new city, capable of dealing rationally with such things as sewage systems, water supply, schools, and zoning before it is too late. Trouble is, the county has no planning staff capable of making a feasibility study for this kind of project.

When the fifteen students in my Government seminar heard about this, they volunteered unanimously to serve as staff assistants to the county planning officer. Under his direction, and with the help of Karl Lamb, head of the Government department, they began to lay out their own work assignments, assemble data, design cost-benefit analyses, and interview key members of the county power structure. They also agreed among themselves to stick together as a task force, at least through the following academic quarter; and the administration gladly arranged to give them credit for the work under a freshly improvised field study rubric. They are still hard at it. Every week or so Judy Gaines or Mike Twombly or one of the others from the seminar writes to let me know how they are coming along.

One thing that got them excited about the project, obviously, was the chance it offered to work in the real world—more fruitful, even, than The Garden. But their main motivation, I think, was their eagerness "to help others in difficulty." God knows, all California is in difficulty, Santa Cruz County not the least. Every student I met is appalled by the rapidity with which a once-glorious environment is being destroyed—by the lumberman's saw, the freeways, leaky offshore oil wells, smog, garbage-choked waterways, and tract developers who slap houses on sites bound to wash away in the first rainstorm. The new city enterprise held out the possibility of their helping to save a remnant of that environment—to do something about what Adlai Stevenson, long ago, called "the quality of American life." They snapped at it like a trout.

By traditional standards, the Santa Cruz experiment may be a failure. It doesn't seem likely to crank out many graduates who will raise the Gross National Product, or manage conglomerates, or command efficient political organizations. On the other hand, maybe we already have enough universities producing people like that. If the Santa Cruz output runs instead to seers, artists, experimenters-with-life, or just gentle, concerned people, it may still be worth the considerable sums which the California taxpayers are putting into it. If I were twenty, I think I might want to go there myself.

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