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Isla Vista: A Painful Look Back

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ISLA VISTA — Older people have not been very helpful to this community, where only one in four has reached voting age.

In past weeks older people have been blaming each other for what has resulted in police state conditions within the tiny, unincorporated ghetto of 13,000 adjacent to the University of California.

UC officials say the county banned them from doing any planning or development in Isla Vista. The county says it was a University responsibility all along.

In fact, high rents are charged for badly constructed dwellings that sprang up without planning controls to match a rapid increase in enrollments next door.

Few professors ever set foot in the area, although three-fourths of the population consists of UC students.

Not long ago, older people referred to Isla Vista with a mixture of envy and dislike as a center for sun, sand and sex. Now they speak of it as an incubator for discontent.

It remains for a Briton, philosophy professor Jon Wheatly, to insist it is as "American as apple pie." Wheatly, one of the few professors actively to help the community, believes Isla Vistans are revolting against oppression and against government without representation.

The area is governed on paper by the county supervisors, who meet 12 miles down the road in Santa Barbara. None of them live near Isla Vista. The community is policed by the sheriff, who answers only to the supervisors.

Isla Vista physically is little more than one half square mile in size, bounded by the sea and campus. The nearest community with a normal range of ages and occupations lies several miles away.

The central area consists of a few struggling shops, mostly with plywood where windows once were, the now well-known branch of the

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Bank of America, and a block of trampled lawn.

The lawn represents what some regard as a pitifully late and inadequate effort by UC to get involved, through donation of an open area within a community that has one of the highest population densities in California.

Last week it was the rallying place for students and others which led to several hundred arrests, the climax to five months of disturbances.

There had been serious and tragic warnings of what was to come before last winter, however. More than a year ago, a night watchman ran screaming from the Faculty Club, fatally burned by a bomb explosion.

Last January a popular instructor learned his contract would not be renewed. This led to demonstrations and ill will between students and the faculty, spurred by inflammatory writings in the campus newspaper.

This was followed by a succession of demonstrations fired by events such as the conviction of the "Chicago Seven;" an address by their attorney, William Kunstler; the burning of the bank and the accidental police shooting of a student; the reaction to the presidential decision on Cambodia; and, finally, the indictment of 17 Isla Vistans.

The last was interpreted by students as delayed vindictiveness against young people known to be among the community leaders. They were accused of leading demonstrations involving the bank months earlier. Subsequently, two indictments were dropped because they involved young men in jail at the time they were accused of leading riots.

Bruce MacVicar, an Isla

Vista resident assigned by UC to work with the community, noted there was much resentment then directed against the Bank of America. The latter had offered a large sum in reward for information leading to indictments.

Following announcement of the indictments, radicals in the community organized a march on the bank. They were met by MacVicar and a large number of students.

"We stood our ground and they went away," MacVicar recalled. The second night, however, the demonstrators got to the bank and did some damage before MacVicar and others forced them away.

Then, Saturday night, the police trucks came in, a 7:30 p.m. curfew was imposed and the scene changed.

"As soon as the police came into the community, fraternity men and everyone else began to take to the streets. Rocks were thrown and there was a great deal of violence," MacVicar recalled.

The police appearance was dramatic. Santa Barbara sheriff's deputies wore green jump suits, flak jackets, shotguns, rifles and black berets. They patrolled in county dump trucks with plywood walls raised above the sides to ward off rocks and more vicious missiles.

They were joined by the pride of the Los Angeles county sheriff's department, the Special Enforcement Bureau. The 80-member unit went through Isla Vista to enforce the curfew as if they were invading a Vietnamese village with orders to clean it out.

Hundreds of complaints from a cross-section of students and a few of the faculty who had spent nights as observers in the area indicat-

ed that the deputies had rampaged destructively through dwellings, smashed heads with their clubs, kicked and slugged students whether or not they were resisting arrest.

The police used some sort of plastic vise to tie young men and women's hands behind their back. The vises cut circulation and many of the arrested had them on for hours. Some were reported rolling on the ground in agony. One, his hands and wrists still blue and partly numb a day later, said he was relatively fortunate.

Ray Varley, a red-bearded UC official who has been working with community leaders, believes the police should have been held back. But he admits there are enough radicals in the community to require that the police be readily available.

David P Gardner, executive vice chancellor, has listed three basic causes for conflict in Isla Vista:

- An extensive drug problem, owing to the concentrated presence of more than 10,000 young people, "creat-

ing not only the psychological and emotional problems associated with the widespread use of soft and hard drugs but also an aggravated relationship between many residents and the police.

- "Without the more natural spread of ages, activities, life styles, and interests that characterize most communities, it can be said that the typical Isla Vista resident lives in an unencumbered social, ethical and moral environment — a situation of special significance given the immediate post-adolescent problems that confront the vast majority of persons living there."

- A "critical dissimilarity" in values between residents of Isla Vista and elsewhere, "about the value, worth, importance, and relevance of private property, personal responsibility, self-discipline and permissiveness."

A slight relaxation of curfew regulations, weariness, and the end of the academic year next Tuesday lead observers here to hope matters may quiet down at least until next fall.