

An Amphitheater for the Damming  
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Strawberry Canyon is different than most of the other canyons of the East Bay hills. It's not so much a cleft as an amphitheater that captures a lot of water into a perennial stream and then opens to the piedmont below through a constricted notch that, like the Golden Gate but on a much grander scale, opens the Great Central Valley to the Pacific Ocean. In fact, ever since I first came to Berkeley in 1967, I've thought what a *remarkable* place it is — the Chinese would say that it has good feng-shui — here it is directly opposite the Golden Gate. 30 miles outside the Gate sit the Farallones momentarily parked on their ride north from Southern California on the Pacific Plate in the geologic blink of time that humans briefly appeared here.

What an astonishing natural axis! I think that the local Indians must have known this since, as Richard Schwartz has said, there were so many of them living and buried along this axis.

It's a place that has, for nearly a century and a half, seen a contest between what I think of as the organic, or integrative

vision of what we humans can be on a most remarkable planet, and that of conquest and disintegrity. One promotes health, the other its opposite as it heedlessly and hubristically rips apart the very fabric of life for motives of profit and power.

I thought I'd talk about the canyon, and what goes on in it, in terms of health, and of hell.

The men who moved the College of California from downtown Oakland and then founded the UC came from the integrative tradition that I believe is the best that we have done: they were men of the New England Enlightenment. They imagined that the people of California would be broadened and enlightened by having not just a land grant college of agriculture and mechanics here but the smorgasbord of options provided by a true *university*. They hired Frederick Law Olmsted — another outstanding product of the New England Enlightenment — to design the campus. Olmsted was himself a genius who understood the genius of *this* place and imagined a campus in which nature would predominate and where students and their mentors would live together amidst groves similar to those of the ideal Greek academy.

That, of course, was not to be. After Olmsted went back East, the University grew with little planning or coherence until the Phoebe Hearst competition of the late 1890s which coincided with the Spanish-American War that announced that the U.S. had become an empire with territories and interests all the way across the Pacific. Architect John Galen Howard deliberately organized his white City of Learning around a central axis aimed at the Golden Gate. At the dedication of the Hearst Memorial Mining Building, he said that the axis symbolizes “Alma Mater’s peaceful and beneficent conquest of the Pacific Ocean.” That statement turned out to be far more prophetic (and ironic) than he could ever have imagined.

Nonetheless, the magnificent site continued to call forth in visionaries capable of integrative thought conceptions of a city radically different than San Francisco across the Bay. At the time of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, Oakland and Berkeley hired German planner Werner Hegemann to draw up a plan for the development of the East Bay. Hegemann’s plan is a far more radical and comprehensive document than the more famous plan for SF by Daniel Burnham. Burnham’s plan was largely a product of the City Beautiful movement whose goal was primarily to create more attractive cities.

However admirable that goal, it had little to say about how to improve the daily lives of the working class or about democracy. Hegemann's plan imagined that by intelligent growth, one could create a City *Healthful* in all senses of that term — that one could and *should* plan for the *total* needs of the human. Aesthetics was an important part of that package but not dominant in it.

Hegemann constantly referred back to the proposals of “the Great Olmsted, Sr.” of 50 years before. Chief among Olmsted's proposals was the need to create a chain of parks along the hills with parkways along the creeks connecting the hills with the Bay thus providing greenways for people of all incomes. It was an audacious plan, partially taken up again in a plan developed by Olmsted's son FL Olmsted, Jr and Ansel Hall in 1930. That laid the groundwork for the EBRPD.

Unfortunately, the opportunity to use Strawberry Creek and Canyon as a connector to the ridgetop parks was seriously compromised soon after WW1 when General David Prescott Barrows took over the presidency of the UC in the midst of the patriotic triumphalism and red-baiting hysteria of that time. (The Finns of west Berkeley were especially suspect: at one

point, the Berkeley police brutally raided and trashed the Red Finnish Hall on 10<sup>th</sup> street.) Universities all over the U.S. were at that time building sports stadiums as ostensible memorials to the casualties of the Great War, but behind it was an issue of health: the draft had revealed that many young American males were shockingly ill prepared to fight. Poverty, illiteracy, and hard work will do that to a man.

It was a matter of competitive pride: Stanford had built a huge dirt bowl stadium, so could Cal be left behind? The University announced plans and began subscriptions for a stadium to be built at the SW corner of campus with its axis on Ellsworth Street. In a last minute switch, however, the regents moved the site to the mouth of Strawberry Canyon, apparently for reasons of cost. A tremendous local ruckus ensued: the stadium would blast open the canyon mouth and squat on top of a culverted Strawberry Creek. It would cause terrific traffic and parking problems on game days. But most of all, it would concentrate 80,000 people directly on top of the Hayward Fault, and provide little access for evacuation and emergency services *should anything happen*.

All these arguments were to no avail: the Regents approved the stadium and rushed its construction so that it would be ready in time for the Big Game of 1923. John Galen Howard at first opposed it, then designed it, but his initial opposition counted against him with certain regents and contributed to his abrupt firing several years later.

The stadium is, appropriately, designed as a Roman coliseum, for it was an act of conquest completely at odds with the Omsted and Hegemann visions of city-nature integrity. Architect Walter Steilberg also at first opposed it, then proposed that its east embankment could do double duty as a dam backing up Strawberry Creek and turning the Canyon into a fjord for swimming and crew practice. That did not happen: the V-shaped Canyon floor was later apparently filled with spoils from construction sites up on the hill and recreational facilities built on it. Crew teams would use Aquatic Park when the WPA built that in the 30s.

With the onset of the Great Depression, big changes happened in the Canyon and on the hills above it. Franklin Roosevelt established the CCC in the spring of 1933 to, as he said, bring together ruined land and young men to heal both of them at

once. Within a very short space of time, thousands of CCC camps were built throughout the country, each with 200 enlistees. One of them was right up the road here.

The men in this camp did much of the work to create the Botanical Garden. But they did something else that had even more lasting value: they made ten giant plaster relief maps of the East Bay that were used to sell voters on the idea of approving bonds to acquire lands for the regional park system that the Olmsteds, Hegeman and Ansel Hall had proposed. Richard Lang has found one of those maps: it's up at the Wildcat Canyon Visitors Center which is where another of their camps were. The "boys" then went to work making Tilden, Temescal, Redwood, and Sibley Parks accessible and inviting for millions of people and generations. They left no markers that they had been there so most people who use the parks don't know they were there or the debt we owe them.

Meanwhile, however, up on the hill above the CCC camp something else was happening that would not produce such healthy results. Ernest O. Lawrence had become California's scientific superstar, especially after winning the Nobel Prize in 1939 for his ostensible invention of the cyclotron. His atom-

splitting machines had grown ever larger and more dangerous along with his fame. In late 1939, the regents gave him permission to build his largest cyclotron to date in the canyon where he at first wanted it for both privacy and safety because of the radiation it generated. After consulting with the campus architect, Arthur Brown, Jr., however, he decided to build it on top of Big C Hill where, as he said, it would dominate the Bay Area. Safety considerations apparently took backseat to publicity.

I tell the rest of the story in my book *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin*. Lawrence soon converted the cyclotron to what he called a prototypical Calutron for the separation of the U-235, some of which would be used in the Hiroshima bomb. Arthur Brown Jr. sited it at the head of the axis that his teacher, John Galen Howard, had said thirty years before stood for the “peaceful and beneficent conquest of the Pacific” when he dedicated the Hearst Mining Building. The Manhattan Project (which never ended) was the beginning of the great uranium boom that made fortunes for some of the regents and their associates. The regents then established two permanent shadow campuses of UC at Livermore and Los Alamos to compete with one another to produce the most

efficient means to destroy a living planet. They and the university administration have been extremely effective in burying this important and ongoing chapter of University history as well as their responsibility for what we are all living and dying from today.

John Galen Howard had intended the hill behind campus to host a sort of Italian village of student housing crowned with an observatory for the exploration of the heavens. Instead, a secretive industrial city grew up around the domed cyclotron, a city truly astounding in its *disintegrated* ugliness for anyone who has seen it up close.

That is only an outward manifestation of the *unhealth* that has emanated from the labs with virtually no publicity. As I said, Ernest Lawrence was well aware of the danger to the public of building the huge cyclotron on the hill, yet he went ahead and did it. Furthermore, I found in his papers that he was just as adamant as Edward Teller that the atmospheric tests conducted in Nevada and the Pacific *must* continue despite growing public resistance to them. We are all now living with the long-term consequences of those uncontrolled experiments decades ago, each one of which was like detonating a nuclear

reactor into the biosphere and letting the winds scatter the results. The weapons and reactors also produced enormous quantities of hot waste, some of which was dumped into the fishing grounds right outside the Golden Gate where it remains to this day with little or no monitoring. Followup studies of the Chernobyl aftermath show that in addition to the predictable surge in cancers and birth defects, another effect of exposure to radiation is a marked drop in human intelligence. I often wonder if that could have anything to do with the sharp rise in autism today, or the sharp *decline* in the qualities necessary for effective leadership and statesmanship.

Some would argue that what we call Big Science was born in the Canyon. It certainly was a chief component of what Eisenhower dubbed the military-industrial complex in which very intelligent people who worked on terrifying weapons became progressively distanced and blinkered by specialization and high pay from the catastrophic health consequences of their work, *whether those weapons were used or not.*

First, they tore apart the atom with little or no understanding of the long-term health consequences; now, they are tearing apart the genetic code and reassembling it with as little

understanding of the consequences of what they are doing as did those scientists who unleashed nuclear energy and its poisonous byproducts upon all of us without any informed consent. The press, as before, has been a willing handmaiden to this uncontrolled experiment, forever touting the Bay Area as a global center of bio- and nanotech and the fortunes to be made in stock speculation while almost *never* mentioning the extreme dangers inherent in this kind of research, especially as nano- and biotech merge. That is left to horror novelists such as Margaret Atwood.

Like most of us, I really haven't wanted to know much about what it seems we have no control in stopping. I am grateful to those people who have not been so passive or willfully ignorant, who have bird-dogged what is happening here and tried to put a brake on it and to reveal, as journalist Richard Brenneman does in his blog, about what is actually going on. They have the integrative imagination that so motivated others such as Olmsted and Hegemann and the nameless boys of the CCC who gave us the Botanical Garden and the parks and possibly even Mather Grove in which we are sitting.

As I said, in establishing the CCC, FDR felt that he could bring together ruined land and ruined men to heal them both. As you probably know, I've been working for eight years to uncover what the New Deal did for us and left us, and now I hope to write a book about the lost *ethical* language of its public works. It seems to me that both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt and the people they gathered around themselves — people like Francis Perkins, Harold Ickes, Harry Hopkins, Hallie Flanagan, Holger Cahill and many more — had the integrative vision that we are so lacking today and lack ever more as its regents and administrators convert this once-great *university* into a vocational school and a profitable R&D facility for private industry such as BP. They thought long and hard about how enlightened government could be used to create a healthier society. To a remarkable degree, I believe, they succeeded, but what they accomplished and how so many of us unwittingly benefited from what they did for us has been buried by the sterile ash fall of free market fundamentalism so that, today, we can scarcely imagine how we might be truly healthy once again. Maybe, in a grove of trees such as this, we can begin to remember, and thus to imagine once again, what we *might* be. It's as good as any other place, and probably a good deal better.