

may-june 2024

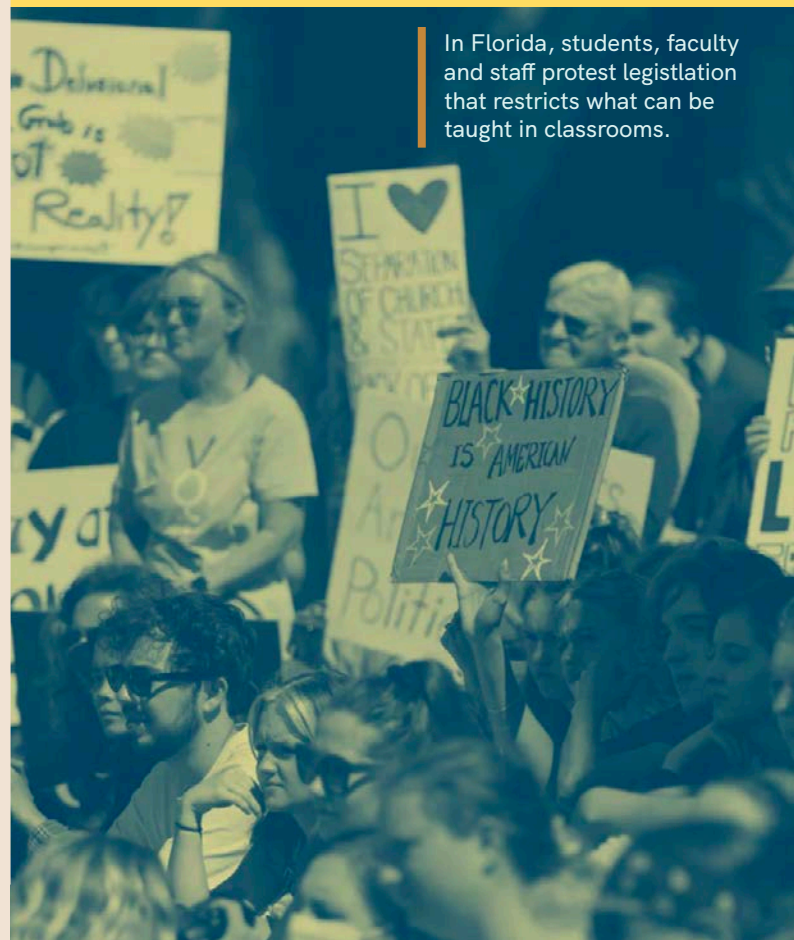
in this issue

diversity equity & inclusion  
newsletter

- anti-DEI legislation at state schools
- mental health awareness month
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photo: giveawayboy (l) AP (r)



In Florida, students, faculty and staff protest legislation that restricts what can be taught in classrooms.

if we were in Florida, we’d have to change the name of this newsletter.

by Maya Samuels-Fair  
Graduate Student, IB

Pre-college socioeconomic and educational disparities are still prevalent, and higher education is still hostile to marginalized groups in myriad ways. As we fight these systemic issues, campus DEI offices and affinity group spaces are an essential vanguard. So-called “anti-DEI bills” have

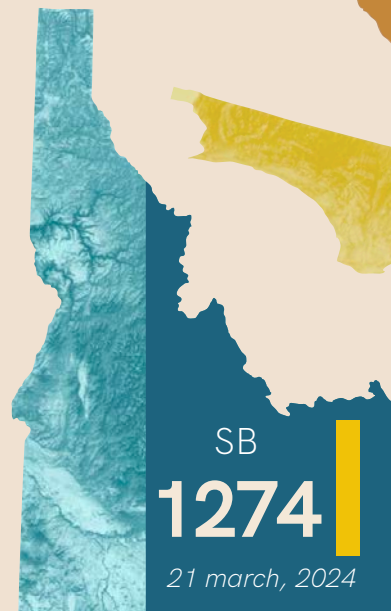
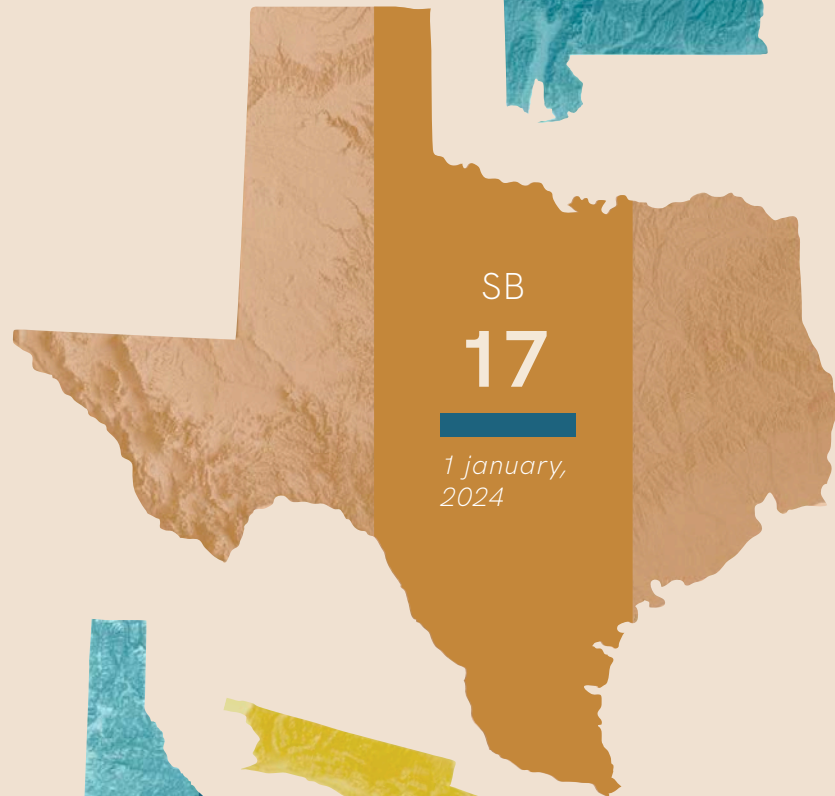
been **introduced in a majority** of **state legislatures** and signed into law in Florida, Texas, Alabama, Utah, Tennessee, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Idaho. Even in states where these bills will not pass, they are a rallying point and a re-election strategy for conservatives. Broadly,

these bills argue 1) DEI offices offer unfair assistance to certain students based on identity, and 2) DEI statements, trainings, and courses coerce students and employees to affirm prejudiced socio-political ideas. These bills intend to use DEI as a straw man with which to activate conservative voters and to limit academic freedom in ways that circumvent existing protections, so the language is intentionally both broad and vague.

Florida passed **SB 266** in May 2023, which states universities “may not expend any state or federal funds to promote, support, or maintain any programs or campus activities that advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion, or promote or engage in political or social activism.” They are **reallocating DEI funds** to faculty recruitment, but the bill goes on to make the strongest restriction on course content of any state thus far; “general education core courses may not distort significant historical events or include a curriculum that teaches identity politics, or is based on theories that systemic racism, sexism, oppression, and privilege are inherent in the institutions of the United States and were created to maintain social, political, and economic inequities.” While DEI office closures and layoffs were immediate, whether faculty will have their course content challenged will take longer to emerge.

In Texas, **SB 17** reads, “the governing board of an institution of higher education shall ensure that each unit of the institution: (1) does not, except as required by federal law: (A) establish or maintain a diversity, equity, and inclusion office; (B) hire or assign an employee of the institution or contract with a third party to perform the duties of a diversity, equity, and inclusion office; (C) compel, require, induce, or solicit any person to provide a diversity, equity, and inclusion statement or give preferential consideration to any person based on the provision of a diversity, equity, and inclusion statement; (D) give preference on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin to an applicant for employment, an employee, or a participant in any function of the institution;

**2024 state legislation to limit or restrict diversity equity and inclusion at colleges.**



**other legislation**

- North Dakota SB 2247, 14 May, 2023
- South Dakota SB 1012, 22 March, 2022
- Tennessee SB 2290, 14 March, 2022



photo: StevenM\_61 (l), Gage Skidmore (r)

*"I'm glad that Florida was the first state to eliminate DEI and I hope more states follow suit."*

*—Ron DeSantis*

left: University of Florida campus  
above: Florida Governor Ron DeSantis

or (E) require as a condition of enrolling at the institution or performing any institution function any person to participate in diversity, equity, and inclusion training, which: (i) includes a training, program, or activity designed or implemented in reference to race, color, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation." According to **USA Today**, Texas State Senator Brandon Creighton instructed university chancellors that changing the name of certain organizations and job titles would not be satisfactory compliance with the law. Their Division of Diversity and Community Engagement changed its name to the Division of Campus and Community Engagement before being shut down anyway. The Multicultural Engagement Center closed as well. However, the Gender and Sexuality Center has so far survived by becoming the Women's Community Center.

In Alabama, SB 129 bans "any program, class, training, seminar, or other event where attendance is based on an individual's race, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, national origin, or sexual orientation." The state can also no longer "sponsor any diversity, equity, and inclusion

program or maintain any office, physical location, or department that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion programs." In addition, students and employees cannot be compelled to take stances on eight "divisive concepts." The divisive concepts imply some coursework requires students to ascribe guilt to certain identities for historical events, and the bill seeks to prevent this allegedly common teaching practice. On the other hand, another clause clarifies that nothing prohibits "an institution of higher education from performing research, collecting data, engaging in recruiting and outreach programs, offering academic support services, engaging in clinical trials, or providing medical, mental, or any health care or clinical services targeted to support individuals of any specific demographic." Because of the breadth of the bill and its many exemptions, the University of Alabama and Auburn University have both stated in **press releases** that they do not yet know the concrete changes the law will require of them.

In Utah, **HB 261** copies the "divisive concepts" from the Alabama bill. Utah's only unique

addition is that one “prohibited discriminatory practice” is any program “referred to or named diversity, equity, and inclusion.” Once again, the bill’s authors were more motivated to contend trendy and inflammatory buzzwords rather than implement clear and effective policy.

If UC Berkeley were subjected to a similar law? The Associate Deans of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within each of our Colleges would lose these administrative appointments. The Offices for Graduate and Undergraduate Diversity would be disbanded. The Centers for Educational Justice & Community Engagement, including African American Student Development, Asian Pacific American Student Development, Chicana Latinx Student Development, Gender Equity Resource Center, Multicultural Community Center, and Native American Student Development would all be defunded or banned. Countless student affinity groups would lose funding and their official platform on university websites. DEI statements could no longer be required in faculty searches. Under Alabama’s law, we could no longer have all-gender restrooms, and transgender people would be banned from using the restroom that matches their chosen gender identity. Consider what the consequences of such rapid and transformative changes would be to our teaching and research community.

The flagship campuses alone in these states have over 180,000 students. Although these laws have passed in seemingly few states, tens of thousands of students holding marginalized identities are losing what meager support they had. For some future college students, getting admitted to a private or out-of-state institution will be a matter of personal safety and self-preservation. Furthermore, the outsized burden on marginalized students to provide unfunded peer support for one another will increase.

How will these laws impact the future diversity of our fields, the academic job market, and our academic freedom? As the interpretation of these laws develops and precedents form, we have the

opportunity to anticipate the potential fallout and organize to help colleagues and students in these states. We are connected to other state universities through our professional societies, as alumni or prospective job candidates, and through our collaborations. Our professional societies could create formal and informal mentorship networks to help impacted students continue on their career paths. Our student support services could offer online community events for students at anti-DEI universities. Our summer research programs could make an effort to recruit marginalized students from these schools. Eventually, these state laws could be superseded by a federal law or by a strengthening of university accreditation requirements, but neither is likely in the near future. Right now, we must check on our colleagues at these battleground institutions and learn how to best support them.

#### **reflection questions:**

1. Has your work, personal beliefs or identity ever come into conflict with politics or cultural values of where you work or live?
2. How do you think laws such as those enacted in Florida and Texas will impact the future diversity of our fields, the academic job market, and our academic freedom?
1. In what ways can you better support academics and students whose freedoms are at risk because of this type of legislation?



Dr. Wendy Ingram (above) is founder and CEO of Dragonfly mental health which seek to address and understand mental health needs in academia.

photo credit: UCB (l) Dr. Ingram (r)

## spotlight on dragonfly mental health for mental health awareness month

by *Edi M-L Wipf, PhD*  
*Student Academic Specialist*

In recent years, greater light has been shown on the mental health challenges academics face across various career stages. From personal accounts<sup>1,2,3</sup> and rallying calls to larger research studies,<sup>4,5</sup> current culture and systems of higher education are being scrutinized and assessed for the degrees of sustainability, exclusion, and harm inherent in the working conditions they create and perpetuate.

In academia, rates of severe depression and anxiety can range at levels of 3-6 times higher than the general population.<sup>6,7</sup> Nearly half of postdoctoral scholars have reported wanting help for mental health concerns caused by their

work and considered leaving science because of this.<sup>8</sup> In one survey of UK researchers, around one third of both graduate students and working professionals met the criteria for "suicide risk."<sup>9</sup> Recent world events have further impacted mental health, with COVID-19 pandemic correlating with a reported 10% jump in the number of students with mental health concerns.<sup>10</sup> The long term mental health costs of a STEM career are also notably greater for individuals from traditionally under-represented groups.<sup>11</sup>

Numerous factors contribute to rising rates of poor mental health, including imposter syndrome, competition, difficulties in balancing work and study with other aspects of life, financial and economic concerns, tough mentor relationships that can include bullying and harassment, isolation, racial and gender discrimination, and mental health stigma.<sup>12,13</sup>

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With these elements at play, it raises the question of whether there are specific considerations that may help address and improve the experience of all seeking to navigate higher education. In other words, when thinking of how we can contribute to either upholding or shifting various social, operational, and institutional norms, what is our individual and collective influence and responsibility within academic environments to impact the senses of support and wellbeing experienced therewithin?

The nonprofit **Dragonfly Mental Health** actively engages with questions such as these in its volunteer-led mission of “cultivating excellent mental health among academics worldwide.” Through the efforts of 300+ volunteers, over 150 programs to 20,000+ academics in 15 countries have been delivered, where throughout the world, Dragonfly strives for systemic culture change in professional training environments.

Dragonfly first came into being when the co-founder and CEO, Dr. Wendy Ingram saw the response to a talk and breakout session she held on the state of Mental Health in Academia at the 2019 I, Scientist Conference on gender, career

paths, and networking. With so much interest and eagerness from others to work to improve mental health in education, Dragonfly began to develop numerous programs that center around research and systemic change, consulting with campus members on interventions, trainings, and workshops, and facilitating supportive networking.

In an **interview**, Dr. Ingram shared, “It is much harder for people to seek care when the dominant culture stigmatizes care seeking and denies the existence and scope of the problem. We inherited this culture so it’s not our fault that it exists, but when I started losing colleagues and friends to suicide, I took it as my responsibility to change it.” With the loss of a friend, Dr. Cris Alvaro, made while both were completing Berkeley’s doctoral program in Molecular and Cell Biology, Dr. Ingram experienced and witnessed the need for greater community resources and support to address academic life’s mental health challenges.

Dragonfly looks to fulfill its mission of achieving excellent mental health in an academic setting by **supporting the creation** of departmental committees and peer networks, improving mental

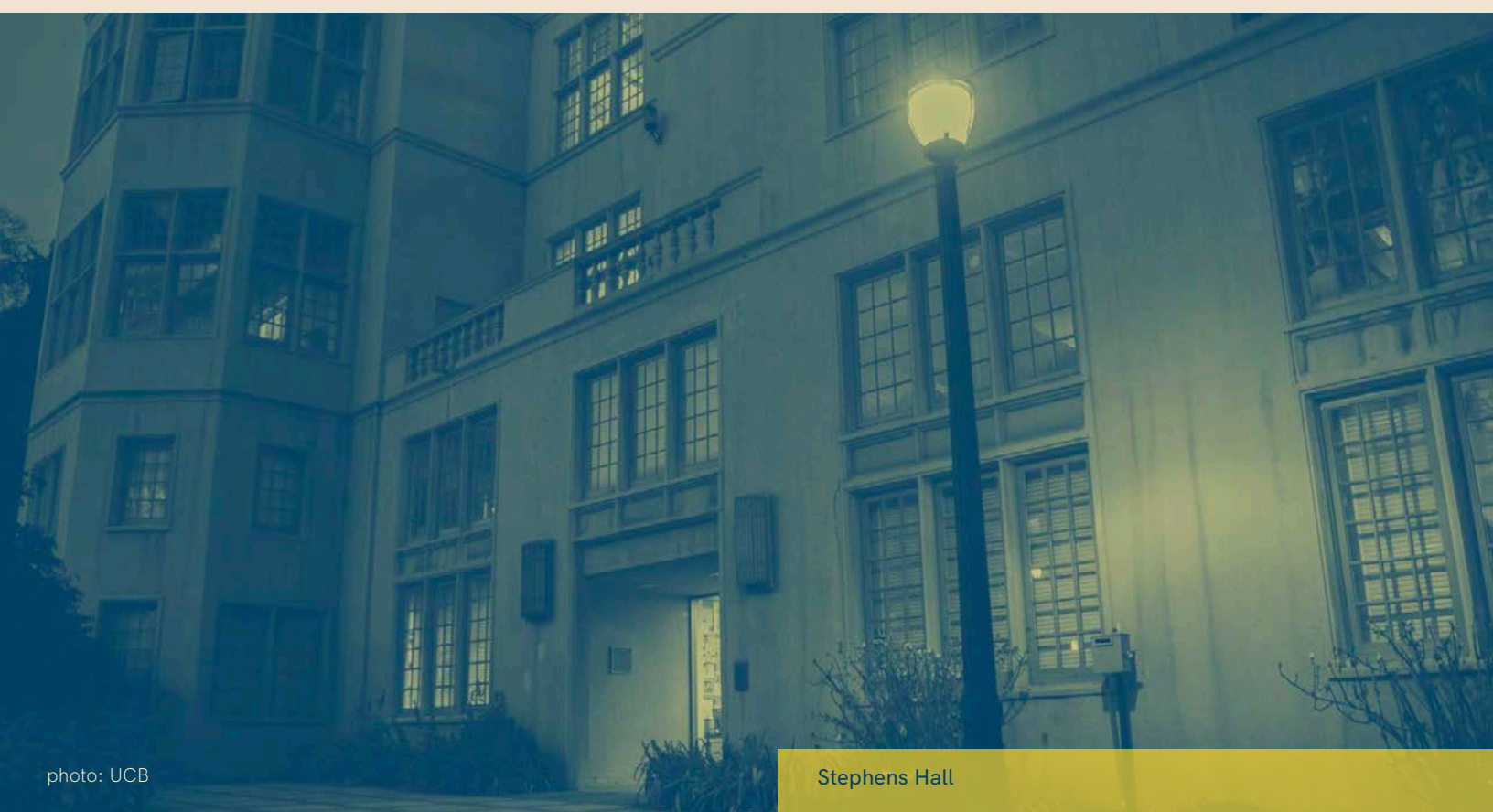


photo: UCB

Stephens Hall

health literacy, fighting stigma, and regular access to **skills training** for researchers. With this work, up to 75% of participants have shown improvement in objective mental health knowledge, 88% report reduced mental illness stigma, and 98% of faculty participants feel more prepared to support distressed students.

At a time when so many futures are possible, and we live and work on the edge of what is known and unknown, value-driven efforts like those of Dragonfly can foster discussion and generate change in ways that bring further hope that academic life outcomes can be improved when awareness is raised, community is built, care is provided, and our needs for connection, rest, recharge, and safety are honored.

*If you or someone you know is struggling, you can find support through these resources:*

### **Graduate Student Mental Health Guide to Caring for Yourself & Your Colleagues**

#### *further readings links*

1. Being Open in Academia: A personal narrative of mental illness and disclosure. Marcia R. England. 2016
2. Navigating Mental Health Challenges in Graduate School. Zachary Murguía Burton, Xiangkun Coa. 2022.
3. Feeling Overwhelmed by Academia? You are not alone? Chris Woolston. 2018.
4. Heeding the happiness call: why academia needs to take faculty mental health more seriously. Amanda Heidt. 2023.
5. How is your thesis going?—PhD student' persepectives on mental helath and stress in academia. Julia Friedrich et al. 2023.
6. Doctoral researchers' mental helath and PhD training satisfaction during the German COVID-19 lockdown. Sandra Naumann et al. 2022.
7. PhDepression: Examining how Graduate Research and Teaching Affect Depression in Life Science PhD Students. Logan Gin et al. 2021.
8. Postdocs under pressure: 'Can I even do this any more?' Chris Woolston 2020.
9. 'You have to suffer for your PhD.' Cassie Hazell. 2022
10. *As the pandemic erodes grad student mental health, academics sound the alarm.* Katie Langin, 2020.
11. Why the mental cost of a STEM career can be too high for women and people of colour. Jean King, 2024.
12. Academic Mental Health Services. Dr. Zoë Ayres
13. Discrimination, competitiveness, and support in US graduate student mental health. Julie Posselt. 2020.

#### **reflection questions:**

1. What ways does the department, campus, and other communities contribute to positive mental health outcomes?
2. Are there practices, events, resources, and/or ways of thinking that have you found particularly helpful in supporting your mental wellbeing?
3. What changes would you like to see that you feel would better support mental health in academia? Are there any steps you are currently making or would like to make?

vlsb courtyard





## future of people's park

by Gregory Arena  
Graduate Student, IB

Every Friday, Berkeley community members, students, and activists for the unhoused assemble at Willard Park. From there, they march North toward Sproul Plaza. On their way, they circle People's Park, a long-standing epithet for Berkeley free expression and in recent years an epicenter for debate around housing and access to public space in the Bay Area. The park which was once a verdant oasis has been framed by shipping crates stacked two high, patched together with concertina wire, and welded steel plate. Paid security guards stand at the corner of each block, and flood light and cameras keep a watchful eye by night. The shipping crates arrived in the early hours of 4 January, on large trucks just as the last protestors were being torn from three of the remaining redwoods in the park.

Police on Haste Street the morning of 4 January, as a barricade is assembled around People's Park.

Walking to campus the next day I took a five block detour to avoid the police barricades. On that morning, I met an older couple walking in the direction of the park. Their home was just behind the police line and the night before they had been woken by the procession of shipping crates that had felt like an earthquake. Their car and all of their neighbors' cars had been towed. They were frustrated and confused by what looked like a war-zone playing out on their front step. Campus conversation has been saturated with messaging that development at People's Park will improve access to student housing, creating housing for those who are unhoused, and be a boost for the neighborhood. But walk by People's Park, and it looks anything but neighborly.

The conflict over People's Park is nothing new. In 1967, the University of California acquired through eminent domain a 2.8 acre residential



block North of Telegraph Avenue, with a long-range goal of building student housing. The university got as far as razing all the houses, but then left the parcel abandoned. The lot sat derelict for two years until neighbors began a community gardening in the space. Every plant that would grow at People's Park—including a grove of towering redwoods that once stood on the eastern side of the park—were planted and carefully tended without the university's consent. In 1969, protests and community action at the park was met with a forceful crackdown by the Sheriff's Department and the National Guard, killing one student and injuring 128 others. In the years that have followed, debate over who should have access to this space, and who should determine the destiny of this space has been a tug-of-war between the University, city planners, neighbors, students, and the unhoused and their advocates. Countless **articles**, **books** and **opinion pieces** have summarized the braided complex history of this park. But this is a story that is also deeply individual and personal for anyone who has experienced the park's transformation.

Lisa Teague has lived in Berkeley for 14 years and for some of that time she was unhoused. A few days before the park celebrated its **55th birthday** we chatted over the phone. "Moving to the East Bay, the plan was to get a job, because I had a

little bit of money." she told me. Once she was able to save and get herself settled she wanted to go back to school to complete a PhD at Berkeley. "But 2009 was a bad year for getting jobs. The job I thought I had waited for me wasn't there when I arrived. I moved here with my daughter, she was 19 at the time. We hung on for a little while. I was 50 years old, and with an odd work background. I'm very educated, but too educated for some jobs and not experienced in the right ways for other jobs."

For Teague, People's Park was a lifeline during those early years. "The period after being unhoused was pretty tough and I was not in great shape. It was little things. Just knowing that there

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*"We will keep fighting and protest the construction while it is going on. The University would like us not to be mad. That is their great wish, that we would shut up. They would like us to go away."*

*—Lisa Teague*



Representative Barbara Lee, speaking at the 34th Anniversary of the park.



photos: people's park



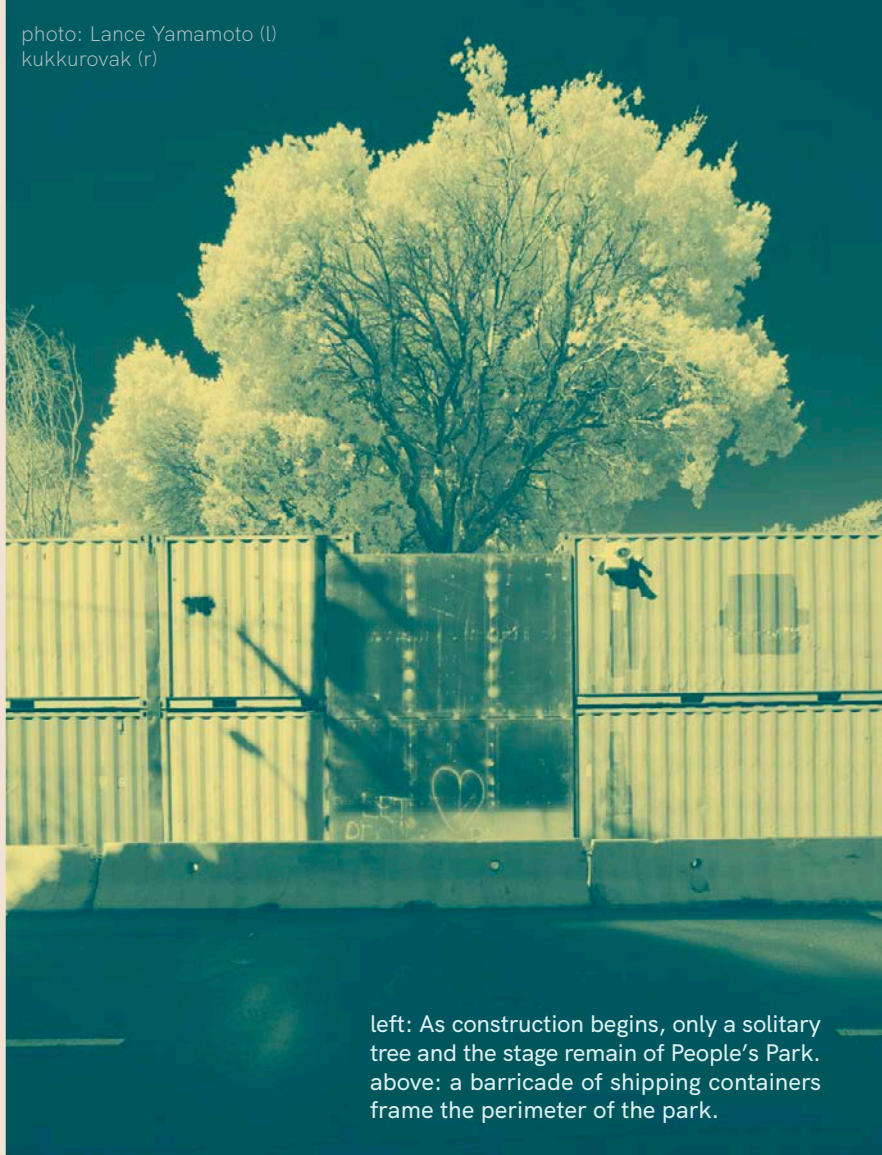
*the people of people's park*

photos courtesy of  
People's Park



*"I believe that Carol [Christ] and the campus have struck a very sensible balance and I plan to continue it,"*

*—incoming Chancellor  
Richard Lyons*



left: As construction begins, only a solitary tree and the stage remain of People's Park. above: a barricade of shipping containers frame the perimeter of the park.

was someone I could bum a cigarette from, or that there would be Food not Bombs around 3.30 in the afternoon. If you brought your own container, they'd fill you up. You could make that last for a couple of meals. Or, 'Can I have a sip of your coffee?' Sometimes it was that bad." The park was a place where the unhoused could access basic needs.

Teague, who now works in harm reduction, has spent the last decade finding ways to uplift a community that's played such an important part in her life in Berkeley. In 2011, **Homeless Action Center**, helped place her onto the Berkeley Housing Authority waitlist. "When I started to do a little better, I tried to give back. So for a while I'd let people take showers at my house. Had to stop because people get upset when there are homeless people in your building. So I'd start

to put food on the [People's Park] stage or if people picked up food with their food stamps and wanted it cooked I could cook it for them. Storing people's stuff if **they get arrested** is a big one. If you get picked up on a warrant or a stay-away, you're going to be gone for a minute. You won't want the cops to have your stuff, either they store it away and it gets moldy or damaged, or they never return your belongings. 'Mama Lisa will take that.' people would say to the cops. I still have someone's stuff even though I haven't seen him in years now. He's not dead, in San Francisco now. But he's not doing too well." For Teague, and others, the park was a place of connection and caring. "I got a lot of emotional support from the community," says Teague "I met one of my dearest friends when I first came to the park."

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On 15 May, 1969 Governor Reagan deploys the National Guard on Berkeley residents at People's Park. Marvin Gaye's *What's going on?* is inspired by the brutalization of these peaceful gardeners.



It's hard to remember that before Covid, People's Park was a clean and tidy patch of bermuda grass with small overgrown community vegetable beds, tall trees, and a multi-purpose community space. Even ten years ago, there were unhoused persons who would spend their days in the park but it was also a space shared by highschoolers playing pick-up basketball, local residents, community fairs, and college students. "People never slept in the park until 2020. UC was rigorous about that." Teague recalls that even **Hate Man**, a well-known fixture of the park, and former New York Times columnist who passed away in 2017, never truly lived in the park. "As he got older and more frail, [Hate Man] would sit on his air mattress in the park but would move outside of the bounds of the park at night." But things changed with the pandemic and the CDC's order to shelter-in-place. "UC agreed to allow people to stay in the park. UC tries to treat the homeless in alignment the ways the city treats the homeless. When the city started sweeping folks in 2021, we thought the UC wouldn't

be far behind." Instead, the University allowed homeless encampments to continue in the park through 2022 even as they complained about the homelessness. For Teague, this is an example of what many proponents of People's Park will refer to as **benign neglect**—meaning issues are not addressed for the purpose of exacerbating those issues to shape a public narrative.

In recent years, the park has been viewed in the press and by the university as a **crime hotspot** and a blight to the campus. Advocates for the protection of People's Park point to benign neglect as one of the universities primary strategies for creating that paradigm. That included

everything from digging up and cutting down trees planted in the park to shutting off the water to bathrooms added to the park by the city of Berkeley. Teague recalls how in 2019 for the 50th anniversary, a few activists came together to build a freebox, essentially a little free lending library but for clothing and basic necessities. “It was the freebox of everybody’s dreams. It had shelves and doors and it was finished and put up at the 50th anniversary. UC let it stand for about 3 weeks until they came with a tiny bulldozer and knocked it over.” By 2022 the park was piled with construction debris and slash from cut trees. Even before the barricade went up the Park was being **slowly destroyed**.

“We will keep fighting and protest the construction while it is going on. The University would like us not to be mad. That is their great wish, that we would shut up. They would like us to go away.” In an effort to appease community pushback to

the project the university has proposed creating supportive housing for 125 unhoused persons at People’s Park to accompany planned dormitory contraction. But as of yet, the university has failed to confirm a developer for the project. Part of this lies in a lack of funds for this project. UC Berkeley rendered itself **ineligible for funding** from the Department of Housing and Urban Development after the University destroyed a federally recognized historic site without NEPA approval. Berkeley is also seeking dialogue with park advocates like Teague about the creation of a memorial for the park. But park activists do not plan to engage in these discussions until the fate of the park is determined. “They need to have a memorial because of its historical designation, and they like the history of resistance, and rebellion. But they don’t want the **physical reminder** that this [park] exists and that 55 years ago, this Saturday, some punks took their land and have held onto it ever since. It’s upsetting for them.”

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## upcoming events + campus resources

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- 1 May—**International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People**, 2.00pm, 1301 Clay St., Oakland.
- 19 May—**Bay to Breakers** (all day) Embarcadero to the Great Highway, San Francisco



two girls hold protest signs at Peoples Park, 1977.

Have a story or event you would like to see featured in upcoming newsletters? Email us at [dei.news.biology@berkeley.edu](mailto:dei.news.biology@berkeley.edu).

*Supervisors—please circulate this newsletter to lab members and staff who may not be on our listserv.*