To generations of Mizzou students the quiet strip of trees and grass on the north edge of Campus was known as McAlester Park. But 20 years ago this spring a new name — Peace Park — was forged by throngs of student demonstrators protesting the Vietnam War and the four young students killed by National Guardsmen at Kent State.

That spring of 1970, the monsoon winds from a jungle war in Asia blew a tie-dyed, long-haired wave of protest onto a button-down MU Campus. Backed by the crackle of bullhorns and the roar of rock 'n roll anthems, bell-bottomed student demonstrators butted heads with University administrators determined to keep the Campus open.

Peace Park is one of the last icons of the anti-war turmoil that divided the nation and the Campus. Almost hidden by grass is a circle of white rocks, laid out in the form of a peace symbol and planted with low shrubs and flowers. The memorial is carefully tended by a volunteer group, Friends of Peace Park.

This spring, on the 20th anniversary of Kent State, students and members of the community gathered for a quiet ceremony to rededicate the park and to remember that warm, rainy spring of 1970.

It definitely wasn’t quiet 20 years ago at Mizzou. Political bombast boomed from all sides. Still, the demonstrations here were almost tranquil compared to the rocks and bottles, firebombs and tear gas that lit up anti-war protests at hundreds of other campuses around the country.

At Mizzou, the U.S. invasion of Cambodia and the violence at Kent State touched off a week of rallies and protests around Campus attended by thousands of students.

Things came to a head May 11, 1970, when nearly 3,000 demonstrators settled in on Francis Quadrangle for a showdown with University administrators. The crowd demanded an official statement condemning the war in Vietnam; administrators responded by locking the doors of Jesse Hall. Chancellor John
Schwada issued a set of strict emergency regulations.

The Quad was filled with bobbing anti-war banners. Demonstrators, chanting and waving the two-finger peace sign, crowded around the Columns and spilled up the steps to Jesse Hall. Lining the Quad was a row of MU, city and state police who watched through the Plexiglas bubbles of their riot helmets and listened to taunts from the crowd.

Before the day was over, 32 people were arrested for trespassing and released without being charged. Over the next few days a group of administrators, faculty and student demonstrators managed to negotiate a delicate truce that lasted the few weeks until the semester ended and students scattered for the summer.

Although the killings at Kent State triggered the massive demonstrations, some observers say they also shocked protesters into moderation. "I think a lot of people got really frightened by Kent State," says Trish Vandiver, AB '76, MS '81, PhD '88. By that spring Vandiver, a member of the radical Students for a Democratic Society, was already a veteran peace activist.

"There were always individuals who were interested in doing more violent things, things that generated more attention. But there never was a violent faction at MU," Vandiver recalls. "We didn't have enough people to have a faction. If there was anybody committed to violence it was one or two people perhaps."

Ron Mason, the current director of University Police, was a security consultant on campus during the protests. "I think Kent State and other violent demonstrations really chilled things," Mason says. "The demonstrators started to realize 'People are dying here doing this stuff, it's not fun anymore.' I believe a lot of students were in it for the fun of it."

One reason for the relative lack of violence at MU, Mason says, was the hardnose stance the Campus administration took. "This school really hung tough. By and large we did pretty well, considering all the conflicting political pressures," he says.

Some observers dismiss the campus peace demonstrations as political panty raids or recreational revolution by a group of pampered students.

But for many, the events that spring were deadly serious. "There's a myth that's been propagated that the people against the war were afraid of being drafted," says Rory Ellinger, MA '69, a campus leader during those times. "It was a movement of conscience, I don't think there's any question about that. We felt what the government was doing was reprehensible, and we were ashamed to be a part of it."

Ellinger, now an attorney in O'Fallon, Mo., says the student movement made a lasting difference at MU. "There have been changes at the University, significant changes," he says. "We forget that when we came there women were locked into their dorm rooms at night. Things had greatly changed by the time a lot of us left. There were student representatives on boards. I think the University became much more responsive to student demands, to due process for students."

For Ellinger and other student leaders the anti-war protests were anything but a springtime frolic. "We were being tape-recorded and followed around. There was a lot of fear, we got threats, letters, Some of us even moved our bookcases in front of our windows."

And there was an ugly side to the long hair and the love beads of the hippie lifestyle. "There were excesses — drugs being an example," he says. "Drugs really were a scourge. The Left was wrong in its excessive, hedonistic lifestyle."

The long-hairs and protestors clearly rubbed some MU students the wrong way. Cmdr. Charles "Heater" Heatley III, BJ '72, still questions how many of the student demonstrators actually were committed to the ideals of the peace movement, and how many simply wanted to avoid military service. "Many were clearly motivated by pure self-preservation. They had no clue where Vietnam was or what it was about," he says.

Heatley now lives in San Diego and flies F-14 Tomcat fighters for the Navy, but that spring of 1970 he was a Navy ROTC cadet. He still remembers the jeers from other students when he put on a uniform and marched in the weekly drill.

"Most of us in ROTC felt like it was misdirected. It was frustrating to have your friends and contemporaries saying that just because you're wearing a uniform you're guilty of all kinds of foul deeds," he says. "We signed up for all the right reasons, but we were made to feel like we were terribly wrong, just by a few people with banners. Nobody came and interviewed ROTC cadets."

The years have erased most of the animosity. Vandiver, the former SDS member, was dismissed from the University 20 years ago for her role in an abortive student takeover of Read Hall. Now she works as a psychologist for MU. "I'm not sorry I was involved; I almost feel sorry for people who don't get involved in something," Vandiver says. "All of us who went through it were altered in some way because we really had to think about what our values are."

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Top, in the spring of 1970 the U.S. invasion of Cambodia and the violence at Kent State triggered anti-war rallies on Campus attended by thousands of students. Below, at one rally on Francis Quadrangle, police arrested dozens of protesters, who were later released.

Jim Donke, BJ "71, photographed student protests for Missouri Alumnus. He is founder and president of Donke Enterprises Inc., a manufacturer of accessories for photojournalists.