

***Who Killed the Berkeley School?
Struggles Over Radical
Criminology***

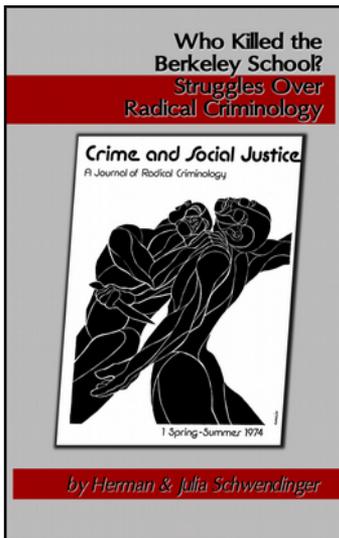
by Herman & Julia Schwendinger
with foreword from Jeff Shantz

Surrey: Thought|Crimes Press, 2014.
220 pages.

<http://thoughtcrimespress.org/BerkeleySchool>

Reviewed by—*Aaron Philip*

Criminology student, Kwantlen
Polytechnic University, March 2015



Who Killed the Berkeley School is a story of struggle and tragedy, as the name suggests. The struggle is against what Jeff Shantz calls one of Ronald Reagan's forgotten "frontal assaults on dissent and resistance."¹ It was in 1977 that the Berkeley radicals school was defeated, as Ronald Rea-

gan, the Regent of UC Berkeley, Governor of California and soon to be the next President of the United States acted against them. Told from the perspective of central participants,

¹ Foreword i

Julia and Herman Schwendinger, the book reads partly as a historical account and partly as a eulogy, chapter one details an “autopsy conducted after an assassination”² The book’s goal seems to be to provide insight into what happened at the University of California—Berkeley and provide lessons for contemporary radicals and activists. On this basis, the book will be reviewed, for how well it meets this goal.

The impact of the Berkeley school is made very clear from the foreword by Jeff Shantz “The Berkeley School radicals identified the real sources of social harm in society—state, military and corporate actions. They also insisted on calling these harms by their proper name—crimes.”³ Shantz goes on to declare that the Berkeley school is a model which critical criminology should strive toward.

MAIN ARGUMENTS AND INSIGHTS

Based on the titles of the chapters and the foreword, the book sets up a narrative of uncovering and exposing the “friendly fascists” that are all around us and seeing the deeper meaning behind power relations in society and how they leads to oppression. The academic institution is joined with the community as the Berkeley school offered means of resistance for students and community activists.

² Page 3

³ Foreward 1

Early on, the book identifies the enemies of the Berkeley school as government and university officials, including faculty whose senses had been dulled by McCarthyism and the Cold War.⁴ It seems to be a constant feature of politics that blind patriotism will allow otherwise rational and educated people to rationalize the images of war and support their government in campaigns of repression and terror.⁵ Also in chapter 2, the powerful regents are introduced, the American elites who own or sit on the board of directors for many transnational corporations. The beginnings of the theory of overlapping nodes of power, a central feature of critical theory are to be found here, what Dwight D Eisenhower first called “the Military-Industrial complex.” Regents sitting on the Lockheed Corporation, Institute for Defense Analysis, among others set the stage for a confrontation when the radical school of criminology at Berkeley decided to resist the powerful capitalists. To suppress this development the book provides a logical account detailing how the regents attempted to silence the critics of the state-crime empire by “seizing the power to veto tenure recommendations—a power traditionally given to UC chancellors.”⁶ Throughout the book, footnotes are engaged to add additional background information and detail.

⁴ Page 9

⁵ Page 12

⁶ Page 14

The Berkeley School fights the stereotype of radicals as “‘extremists’ and ‘utopians’ with ultra-left aims.”⁷ The book argues that the radicals were of diverse backgrounds and interests but were brought together by a mutual awareness of the unjust oppression endemic to a corrupt capitalist society and a desire to be a part of the social movements that characterized this period of history.

A point that is pertinent today, in the age of mass uprisings around the world, including the Arab Spring of 2011, Occupy Wall Street protests, and uprisings in Brazil and other countries plagued by inequality and corruption, is the comparison of how violence is being used. The protests organized by Berkeley were largely peaceful, and the odd violent protestor, acting outside the intent of the majority gathered through “gratuitous, spontaneous and disorganized violence” “pales in comparison with the organized and systematic clubbing and beatings by the police.”⁸ Often the message of a protest can be lost when violence enters the debate. Most people who may otherwise be sympathetic to an oppressed group’s movement now have an excuse to ignore them. The right-wing critics of Fox News cannot however ignore the approach taken to violence by either side in this case, as the example of October 18, 1967 saw 200 police officers who must have been pumped up on testosterone “kicked, clubbed

⁷ Page 33

⁸ Page 35

and beat 4,000 unarmed and nonviolent demonstrators.”⁹ The book features press, physician, police and protestor accounts which include among them the description of a “massacre.”¹⁰ An open letter in the *Daily Californian* condemning the police for brutality and violations of the law can be seen as a model for resistance for contemporary citizens disaffected by police actions and seeking an avenue for resistance. Although the Berkeley School is no longer as it once was, the legacy can be used to continue to resist, as videos emerge like the most recent police shootings of civilians.

GENERAL STRENGTHS

Much of the book focuses on how the Berkeley School engaged the community and offered avenues for resistance. One of the most pertinent examples is the first anti-rape group in the United States, *Bay Area Women Against Rape*.¹¹ This group identified a gap in the criminal justice system and lobbied for humane treatment of rape victims while taking initiative to establish support networks and disseminating information related to rapists’ *Modus Operandi*, as well as advocating a victim-oriented approach and providing sen-

⁹ Page 36

¹⁰ Page 36

¹¹ Page 31

sitivity training to police officers who would handle rape cases.¹²

Descriptions and explanations of the radicals themselves were major strengths of the book, as it succeeded in portraying radicals as regular folks, who held the strength of their conviction and are relatable people, reacting to events unfolding outside the school. The effect is to build credibility and empathy. Rather than appearing as scary radicals out to burn the constitution and blur all lines of familiarity, the book portrays the Berkeley School as rooted in the liberal culture of the San Francisco Bay Area, and as attempting to bring about more “equality, justice and participatory democracy.”¹³ They were trying to make the United States into the place Americans already think it is.

The fact that the book is available freely online is also a strength, as it seems the authors are more concerned with releasing their story, than with making a profit. The credibility of the argument is solidified through this.

CRITICISM

Although the book engages a dramatic style and tells the story with flair, the excessive detail and understandably numerous characters involved make it more difficult to sort through the details to find the core of the narrative. Although footnotes were used to pro-

¹² Page 32

¹³ Page 34

vide additional information, further versions could be edited down for readability and flow.

Overall the book meets its objective of providing insight into the assassination of the Berkeley school and stands up to critical review. Other possible criticisms may be centered around a biased account of the historical events, but this is to be expected given the book is authored by participants rather than neutral observers or researchers.