

Editorial: Berkeley's School of Criminology, 1950–1976

Editors*

History and Background

BERKELEY'S SCHOOL OF CRIMINOLOGY HAS CLOSED DOWN AND IT IS TIME TO summarize our experience and move on. The history of the School, as we have previously pointed out,¹ is by no means a chronicle of progressivism. Founded under the impetus of August Vollmer, O.W. Wilson, and other state technocrats dedicated to creating a "Westpoint" for the domestic "law enforcement army," the School in its early days (1950–1960) trained middle-management personnel in the arts of police and correctional administration, stressing business management, Taylorism, and professionalism. It was a program of good old-fashioned law and order, albeit of Vollmer's reformist brand, and it had little patience even for the niceties of liberal social science. The School's faculty—which included a chief of police, a district attorney, an FBI administrator, and an assistant chief of security from one of California's concentration camps for Japanese-Americans during World War II—had over 125 years of combined experience working for prosecutorial agencies and institutions.

In the late 1950s, there was an important shift in the philosophy and program of the School. This was motivated in part by California's Master Plan for Higher Education, under which the state and junior colleges were given the primary responsibility for the technical and vocational aspects of police training. In 1960, O.W. Wilson left Berkeley to become chief of police in Chicago. Joseph Lohman was brought in as his replacement on the basis of his experience in both sociology (he had taught sociology at the University of Chicago) and law enforcement (he had been sheriff of Cook County, Illinois), as well as his political connections in Washington, D.C. Under Lohman, the School assumed a more sophisticated and liberal character, a precarious mix of narrow vocationalism and social democratic policy-making. During his deanship, Lohman brought in over one million dollars in federal and foundation grants that were used to build the School's infrastructure and political influence within the academy. Very little in the way of scholarly research

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was produced during this period, but there were jobs for research entrepreneurs and grants for students. Lohman hired “names” (e.g., Paul Tappan and Bernard Diamond) to legitimate the School’s growing power in much the same way as the wealthy owner of a new ball club buys aging stars. The School’s “national and international reputation” was consequently made on the basis of grantsmanship, shrewd buys, and effective public relations.

We cannot find one example of outstanding or influential scholarship that was produced in the School between 1960 and 1968 (Tappan might qualify as an influential scholar, but he completed his major work before he came to Berkeley). Under Lohman’s direction, the money flowed in, but there was little concern for the ethical or political implications of the funded research projects. Over \$200,000 was accepted to train federal drug agents: close to \$100,000 was spent on a study of “middle-class delinquency”; and another \$100,000 came from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration to “humanize” 10 carefully picked police officers.

The Roots of Radicalism

Radical criminology was never supported by a majority of the faculty at Berkeley. After Lohman’s unexpected death in 1968, most of the faculty continued to write and teach within the liberal tradition. But a minority of the faculty and a majority of the students began a gradual process of radicalization that would culminate in the formation of the Union of Radical Criminologists and the creation of *Crime and Social Justice*. The story of this radicalization has been told before, but one point needs elaboration.

Though Lohman’s death in 1968 left a political vacuum and enabled the development of more democratic forms within the School, it is important to remember that radical criminology was not simply the product of a change in faculty relations. Rather, it was part of the dramatic political upheavals that affected many campuses during the student movement of the late 1960s. In 1968–1969, police were used on nearly 100 campuses, the National Guard on six. Over 4,000 demonstrators were arrested. Black students were shot and killed at Texas Southern University and in Orangeburg, South Carolina. For about nine months, the National Guard occupied the black ghetto of Wilmington, Delaware, and across the country hundreds of members of the Black Panther Party were arrested and harassed. In Berkeley, there were two important political struggles: a campus-wide student strike led by the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) around the demand for the establishment of an autonomous Third World Studies department, and a massive community and student struggle to control a piece of university-owned land known as “People’s Park.”

Both the strike and People’s Park movement were met with massive, retaliatory state violence. The TWLF strike was broken by city and county police using tear gas, beatings, and selective arrests of student leaders. On the first day of the People’s Park revolt, over 100 people were shot, one man died, and another was blinded. Following a period of street fighting and a reign of terror conducted by the local

sheriff's deputies, over 2,000 National Guardsmen were called into Berkeley to restore order.

During the TWLF strike, the university authorities attempted to continue business as usual, and ordered departmental administrators to maintain classes and to report on faculty who were respecting the strike's picket lines. Leslie Wilkins, who was Dean of Criminology at that time, decided to resign. "I trust the faculty and see my role as supporting them," said Wilkins in his resignation letter, "rather than spying on them as seems required now. My decision to resign was based ... on a cumulative series of political and personal pressures, the former having recently been brought to bear on the University and on the School."

After Wilkins' resignation, Bernard Diamond became Acting Dean, but he too was confronted by social and political forces that were beyond his control. In the spring of 1970, following the continuing defeat of American forces in Vietnam, Nixon authorized the invasion of Cambodia. This action was received with a wave of protests throughout the country. Student demonstrators were killed at Kent State and in Augusta, Georgia. In Berkeley, spontaneous demonstrations developed into a more disciplined and organized movement to reconstitute the university to serve the anti-war movement. In the School of Criminology, the students and faculty overrode Diamond's objections and administrative threats, voting to support the strike and reconstruction.

The politicization of students and faculty in the School of Criminology during this period had far-reaching consequences. In 1970–1971, the radical wing of the School provided a great deal of support to the campaign for community control of the police; in 1972, many people from the School helped to organize a huge prison action conference that mobilized and consolidated the growing prisoner support movement. Others participated in a local anti-rape organization, supported the struggles against the uses of behavior modification and brain surgery in prison, and helped to create this journal. All in all, it was a period of intensive political activity, generated by the broader social conditions of revolt and resistance, and nourished by specific experiences in Berkeley.

Resistance and Repression

Although the School of Criminology per se is not an important loss, we have lost an important base for our work. The School provided us with the opportunity to develop our work collectively and with a certain amount of organizational discipline; it gave us useful resources (libraries, supplies, contacts, etc.) for our work; and most significantly, it enabled us to train and reproduce a constituency of radical criminologists. These by-products of the School played an important role in the development of radical criminology and should not be underestimated. They will be missed and they will have to be replaced.

The loss of the School of Criminology as a base should be understood as a setback. Given the political immaturity of the radical criminology movement, its

relative isolation on the campus, and the systematic repression it encountered, it is unlikely that it could have survived longer than it did in Berkeley. But a number of lessons can be drawn from our experience.

The struggle to retain the School of Criminology was militant and spirited. Thousands of students participated in demonstrations and there was a broad base of community support for the progressive activities within the School. But the tendency of the movement to “bow to spontaneity” in the absence of a stable left organization capable of uniting various struggles seriously undermined the possibility of victory. Consequently, the movement to save the School of Criminology was no match for the administration’s repressive, hegemonic, and tactical superiority.

In addition, the struggle was marred by problematic relations between white and Third World students. Prior to the crisis in the School of Criminology, antagonisms had existed, in particular between the black and white radicals. This was due on the one hand to the failure of progressive whites to give sufficiently high priority to the fight against racism and, on the other hand, to the unavoidable clash between the politics of progressive whites and the cultural nationalist tendencies within the Third World movement. Even though the Committee to Save the School of Criminology actively supported and received support from militant students in departments of ethnic studies (themselves under attack from the university administration), these internal antagonisms continued throughout the struggle to save the School and prevented wider political unity.

There were two other aspects of the struggle that led to important tactical errors. First, there was a failure to correctly assess the class interests of the tenured faculty and to see behind their hypocritical rhetoric of support. With the important exception of Paul Takagi (who had demonstrated his progressive ideas through practice), the tenured faculty in the School of Criminology either sided with the administration or desperately maneuvered to save their own skins. While the students and progressive faculty were fighting to save the School of Criminology, Jerome Skolnick, Bernard Diamond, Sheldon Messinger, and a coterie of academic imperialists from the law, sociology, and business departments were quietly planning a new School of Criminology (to be called, for appearance’s sake, something like “Department of Law and Society”). The new program, which will probably emerge on the Berkeley campus after a year of respectable mourning, will duplicate most of the former School’s curriculum, but will be politically sanitized. Our disappointment with the role that these celebrated liberals played at Berkeley reflects both a naive political analysis on our part and an inability to fully understand that in times of political crisis, most liberal academics become explicit opponents of radical activities. Partly out of fear of losing their own petty bourgeois privileges, but more significantly, because of their identification with bourgeois class interests, they came to support the most repressive administrative actions.

Secondly, the struggle failed to link up the attack on Criminology with other, more pervasive, forms of educational repression. During the late 1960s, many

campus administrations were forced to make concessions to student demands and some jobs were begrudgingly given to radicals, minorities, and women. The repression of the student movement was accompanied by efforts to return the campuses to their pre-1964 consensus. At Berkeley, in the aftermath of reconstitution, the administration authorized a series of new guidelines designed to tighten administrative control. This was quickly followed by the firing of four politically active assistant professors, then by the repression of the whole School of Criminology, and more recently by the firing of three left instructors in the field studies program. The repression of the Third World student movement took the more sophisticated form of divide and conquer: the Department of Black Studies was separated from the other ethnic studies departments through the appointment of a reactionary chairman and provision of considerable money for “program development.” Through a combination of repression, co-optation, and bribes, the administration was able to break the movement’s momentum.

Repression on the campus is not only a matter of hegemonic control. In the current fiscal crisis, cutbacks and tuition increases have fallen heaviest on working-class students. In New York, community colleges are being closed down and the policy of open admissions is under attack; in Berkeley, the administration has proposed an increase in student registration fees; and throughout the country, teachers are being laid off, forced to take cuts in salaries, or manipulated through temporary and part-time employment. The closing of the School of Criminology is not an isolated example of academic repression, but rather part of systematic efforts by the authorities to eliminate the gains of the student movement and shift the current fiscal crisis onto the backs of working-class and minority students.

Don't Mourn, Organize

The radical criminology movement does not end with the School of Criminology. The collective in Berkeley will continue to coordinate and produce the journal. We have moved into a new office and are planning next year’s issues of the journal. There is now a Crime and Social Justice collective operating in Buffalo (State University College) as well as the Union of Radical Criminologists-Justice Action Collective in Boston (U.R.C., in Cambridge). The latter publishes a newsletter that is available, on request, for a small donation. The number of subscribers to Crime and Social Justice continues to grow and we have found increasing interest throughout the country in the issues of radical criminology.

With the loss of our base in the School of Criminology, however, there are some inevitable problems. We need to encourage the development of new collectives and find new ways to facilitate concentrations of radicals. Also, we will have to establish new ways of reproducing and training ourselves now that we no longer have a viable graduate program. The Union Graduate School offers one possibility for remedying this problem.

We are a growing and more experienced movement. Although we suffered a setback in Berkeley, we definitely scored a number of important victories and for the first time are building a progressive alternative to what is perhaps the most reactionary field in the social sciences. It is important that we learn from our struggle at Berkeley and use that experience to deepen our political consciousness and tactical capacity.

NOTE

1. For a full analysis of the history of the struggle at Berkeley, see *Crime and Social Justice* No. 1, pp. 58–61, and No. 2, pp. 42–47 (both 1974).